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FEBRUARY 1928

THE *Illustrated* BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

N.S.E.

FEBRUARY 1928 THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE VOL. 46 No. 4

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THE BLUE BOOK

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Cover Design: Painted by Laurence Herndon to illustrate "Forgotten Country."
Frontispiece: "Men Who Won the West—Wild Bill Hickok." Drawn by William Molt.

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A professional North Woods guide and trapper tells a curious tale of a trap-line set for a human enemy. (Illustrated by William Schmedtgen.)

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MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY, 1928

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE is issued on the first of the month preceding its date (February issue out January 1st); and is for sale by all newsdealers after that time. In the event of failure to obtain copies at news-stands or on trains, a notification to the Publisher will be appreciated.

Advertising forms close on the third of second month preceding date of issue. Advertising rates on application.

Treasurers

Even well-informed people are often amazed to learn that the average age of men enrolled in the Alexander Hamilton Institute is 37 at the time of enrolment, that 60% are owners or officers of businesses; that 25% are department heads; and that 15% are clerks and assistants; 10,954 Institute-trained men are treasurers of corporations. *Among them are:*

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 46 *FEBRUARY 1928* *No. 4*

The Facts of Fiction

"DEEPLY embarrassed, her face turned red as a sugar-beet!" was an interesting line in a story recently submitted. In another, a financier was stabbed to the heart with a *machete* which had been lying on his desk for use as a paper knife!

These stories were returned promptly, of course: the writers did not know their facts. And facts, the facts of life, are the stuff of which good fiction is compounded.

It is for this reason that we are at great pains to choose for you stories written by men who know their stuff—who know human nature, of course, in the first place, for that is the most important element in their material; but who also know the physical facts with which they deal. Thus it happens that so many of our writers themselves live or have lived in the picturesque places they describe, and follow, or have followed, the specially interesting occupations which produce dramatic fiction.

Bud La Mar, for example, whose "A Game of Tags" you will enjoy later in the issue, is a professional bronc'-rider and spent the past summer appearing at various *rodeos*. When he describes bronco-busting, he's just talking shop—but he does it mighty well.

Reg Dinsmore, a new writer whose unusual story of a trapper's attempt to ensnare a human enemy begins on page 111, is himself a trapper and guide in the woods of northern Maine. He knows his traps and trappers.

Jay Lucas, whose stories of wild life in the West have often delighted you, was for years a professional hunter of predatory animals in Arizona. This summer he spent at a prize-fighter's training camp; and the result, one of the most vivid and authentic stories of the box-fighting game ever printed, is to be found on page 47 under the title "The Right Cross-Counter."

And so on through the book: each writer, you will find, knows the facts of his fiction.

Next month you will also encounter this same convincing quality. Lemuel De Bra, who was for years an officer of the Federal narcotic squad in San Francisco, will offer you a really thrilling story of Chinatown and the Barbary Coast. The second installment of "The Tough Nut," by Harold Titus, whose well-known book "Timber" marked him as an authority on the lumber industry, continues the swift pace of the lively chapters which open this issue. And so too Tarzan—which indeed goes far afield in fancy for some of its physical facts—continues true to the eternal verities of human nature and to the laws of making fascinating romance.

There will also be a specially memorable sea-story by Frank Shaw in this great March issue, a Free Lance story by Clarence Herbert New, and many additional tales of the highest quality by such writers as Bertram Atkey, Jay Lucas, Warren Hastings Miller, Culpeper Zandtt, H. Bedford-Jones and the like. Yours for the best in facts and fiction!

—*The Editors.*

Drawn by William Molt

Men Who Won the West

Wild Bill Hickok

FOUR of the ten men who that December day had attacked William Hickok, horse guard for the Overland stage line at Rock Creek Station in Kansas, lay dead on the floor of the little dugout. The others were too close for further shooting, but Hickok fought on with his bowie; just what ensued isn't recorded, however, for as Hickok said, he didn't clearly recall: "I just got sort of wild. I thought my heart was on fire."

Of the four outlaws who got to their horses, one more was shot from the saddle by Hickok, though he was himself terribly hurt; another later died of his wounds. Two of the ten escaped—and William Hickok became Wild Bill to all the frontier. Not until Sergeant Yorke's splendid war-time achievement, with much more effective weapons, has Hickok's extraordinary record of a one-man victory against great odds been excelled.

The Tough Nut

Stirring events among interesting people in a North Woods lumber-camp town make this novel by the gifted author of "Spindrift" and "Timber" attractive indeed.

By HAROLD TITUS

Illustrated by William Molt

IT was Armistice Day in Tincup.

The time was so far removed from that delirious date in 1918 that in many parts of the country the eleventh of November had come to be regarded as simply another day, but Tincup was a mill town and the country around was timber country and in such a community almost any anniversary from the Fourth of July on down to the millwright's birthday is seized upon as an excuse to lay off and play.

So the camps which turned Nicholas Brandon's standing timber into saw logs and the mills which chewed them into dimension stuff and flooring and shingles were deserted, and the entire population of a big territory which had commenced pouring into town the evening before was joined for the day with the residents of Tincup in competing or watching or cheering or listening.

In consequence a mere event such as the arrival of the east-bound passenger train drew no attention whatever and so none but the station agent was there to greet the stranger as he dropped down from the rickety red smoking-car between his pack-sack, slung from one shoulder, and old Don Stuart, literally dangling from his other arm. The agent, trundling his express truck and in a hurry to be done with duty and get back to the more exciting affairs which occupied the rest of the town, spoke:

"Hul-*lo*, Don! Back home, eh? Well! Glad to see you!"

A genuine enough greeting, all right, but the man's pleasure at seeing an old friend was not sufficiently keen to smother his curiosity in the stranger. Evidence of this was in the way his rather mild gaze clung to the strapping young fellow who hitched his pack higher and, with hand still grasping the withered arm of his companion, stood looking about.

"Better git up to the big doin's," the agent called. "Log birlin' 's just goin' on. Big time!"

AS if to vindicate this prideful boast of one of its own, all Tincup and its company opened lips and compressed chests to send up a mighty, roaring shout of acclaim.

"Come on, Dad," the younger man said, looking toward the crowd. "He says a big time. Big noise, anyhow. Let's investigate."

Slowly, then, the sharply contrasting pair moved off, the younger still half supporting the elder and moderating his gait to a stroll that Stuart's quick and audible breathing should grow no more pronounced.

The grand burst of cheering endured until they had crossed the station platform. Then it thinned out until, above its mass, gibes and jeers, whoops of admiration and exultation stood out.

Now a slender young man was climbing a jammer in the mill yard. He lifted himself above the heads of the crowd and held up a hand for silence. This, however, was not readily obtained. A drenched and dripping citizen was only just pulling himself from the chill waters of the pond, a self-conscious grin glued as firmly to

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his lips as the black hair was plastered to his brow by the soaking it had received. On a peeled cedar log in the pond a giant of a man in a gayly checkered shirt, peavey in his hands, balanced and surveyed the throng, a picture of frank and boastful pride in himself.

A few more good-natured taunts must be hurled at the vanquished as he scuttled for the boiler house of the mill; more shouts of approbation must be tossed at the spiked feet of the swelling victor on the log. But the slender man on the jammer continued to wave his hands and finally these gibes and compliments were smothered by other cries for silence.

"Give Birney a chanct, now!" a man shouted as old Don Stuart, breathing painfully but still bright-eyed with interest, was edged into the outskirts of the crowd by his younger companion.

"Gents!" the man called Birney cried from his vantage point. "As chairman of the committee, I'm asking for help! This committee's worked hard. We got a long program of sports for today but this log-birling's going to flop unless we get more contests! They can have tugs-of-war and foot races and things any old place but it's only us folks in the timber who can put on a log birling. Now, let's make it a good one! There is Bull Duval, whose partner in the preliminaries defaulted and who dumped the winner of the semi-final without half tryin'. I ask you, has he earned twenty-five dollars?"

A laugh arose and Duval, on the log, twisted his mustache and leered at the speaker.

"Here we raised a twenty-five-dollar prize and half you river hogs got cold feet just because Duval said he was goin' to roll!" Birney was truly annoyed and took no pains to conceal it. "Aint any of you lads got th' sand to hand in your names and tackle the Bull? I'm darned if I'm goin' to turn over twenty-five bucks to a man that's won on his reputation without tryin' to get somebody to give him a run! Aint there *any*body here that needs twenty-five dollars?"

Another laugh went up and when it had subsided a voice said:

"Here's one! What'll I do to get it?"

A FULL, even, good-natured voice, this, and a quick silence fell over the crowd, followed by an expectant buzz as the stranger, relinquishing his hold on Don Stuart, moved forward, bronzed face uplifted to the man on the jammer.

"Atta boy!" Birney cried. "All you got to do, friend, is to put Mr. Bull Duval off that log and stick by rules."

A few laughs again; a decided movement toward the advancing stranger, and the Bull stopped twirling his mustache while a look of sullen defiance replaced his prideful smirk.

The stranger slipped his pack strap from his shoulder, seated himself on a log, unlaced his shoes and unstrapped the bag. While he drew from its depths a pair of calked river boots, a half dozen of the older men crowded around Don Stuart, shaking his hand and saying the usual things that men say to an old friend they have not seen for long.

One of these was a short, wiry little man, with upturned nose and blue eyes and long lip, talkative and restless.

"And who's the b'y, Donny?" he asked. "Who's the b'y thut's goin' to try Misther Brandon's pet bull?"

Stuart shook his head.

"He's a fine young gentleman, Birdeye, and that's all I know. Found me at the Junction—broke and wantin' to get back home to Tincup. Paid my fare—and helped me. Fine gentleman!"

"He'd better be all o' that!" the other commented with an emphatic nod. "And here's hopin' he's a log-birlin' rascal 'nd that he dumps Misther Brandon's bull 'nd thin drowns him!"

Others came up, greeted Stuart and eyed him with true concern. Any man with half an eye could see that heavy sickness was on him.

Birney was bending over the stranger as he drew taut the laces of his river boots. He straightened as the new contestant stamped his feet into the litter of bark chips, and hopping up on the log, clapped his hands for attention.

"Well, gents, we got one more to try for this prize money. Mister Bull Duval, king of th' Shoestring, will now take on Mister Ben Webster—Mr. Ben Webster of—where'd you say you come from, Webster?"

The stranger, so addressed, was hefting a peavey. He turned that good-natured smile on the spokesman and waved one hand in an indefinite but inclusive gesture. "Yonder," he said and grinned.

"Mr. Ben Webster of Yonder will now roll against Mr. Bull Duval for the grand

With a throaty cry of rage and jealousy the great Bull, missing a stride, went sideways and backward.

prize of twenty-five bucks! That rope around the log marks the middle, Webster. Stay on your own end, don't touch the other man and anything else goes!"

THE crowd edged closer to the pond. Along the boom sticks the man announced as Ben Webster walked lightly, his spikes biting into the bleached and pitted surfaces.

As a helper dragged the cedar with Duval upon it close Webster stood and surveyed his adversary. His glance held that light of good nature and did not linger long on the Bull's glowering countenance. Rather it took in his great shoulders, his mighty chest, his heavy legs in their stagged wool pants and the river boots, shedding water in oily beads. After this, he looked Duval in the eye and grinned broadly.

A sound, like a breath which is almost a laugh ran through the crowd. A likable grin, that was, good-natured, frank, fearless; men take to a grin of its kidney and on the instant Ben Webster, the stranger from yonder, had the crowd with him as against Bull Duval, said to be king of the river.

The cedar came against the boom stick and Webster took his place with a light leap. The log dipped with his added weight. It was a good log, nearly two feet through at the small end, twenty feet long, with a small taper; dry and peeled; a sprightly log, indeed, for such a contest, a log to try the mettle of any man matched with any sort of contestant. Add to this Bull Duval, the best river hog in Tincup, who hefted his peavey and glowered at the stranger.

"I give y' two minutes," he growled.

"Thanks, buddy!" Webster retorted. "I'd say that's sweet of you!"

Duval sniffed as the man with a pike pole pushed them out into the black water of the deep pond. Both men held their peaveys across their middles and, settling their calks firmly in the footing, eyed one another.

"Are you two ready?" Birney cried from shore. Both nodded.

"Then let her *go!*"

A hush! Balanced on the log, faced in the same direction, double an arm's-length from one another, they poised. And then Duval's right toe lifted, the heel pressing downward; the buoyant log moved quickly. His left foot raised free, sharp calks in its sole clawed savagely and with a mighty drive of the leg he had the cedar under motion!

Ben Webster did not offer resistance. He followed the moving footing, walking for the first three or four turns and then, adding his impetus to the birling stick, commenced to trot, with each stride forcing the measure of the turning.

Outheld peaveys wavered with the rhythm of their body movements; water commenced to purr up and over the turning log; the sound of calks biting into the brittle dry wood was audible.

Fast and faster, now. The trotting became a run; the run waxed to a nimble dance. The purr of water was louder and spray drenched them to their shins.

They watched one another. Ben Webster still grinned. If anything, his grin was higher and his tongue tip showed in a corner of his mouth for all the world as though he repressed laughter. The Bull's look occasioned this light mood. He glared, his black brows drawn together.

Up and down, up and down; a mad gallop of supple limbs, and then—

Duval leaped. He leaped high and without warning and, feet spread, drove his calks deep into the log again, hunching his shoulders, thrusting his peavey before him for balance, bending forward. The spin of the stick stopped dead and had his opponent been caught unprepared he would have pitched face foremost into the pond.

But Webster was not unprepared. He had watched the Bull's every move. He did not jump when Duval jumped; he waited a split instant, eyes on Duval's feet, and when he saw the toes pointed stiffly downward he rose nimbly into the air, a galloping break in his swift run, and came down, poised, spread-legged himself, crying out an ejaculation of mock distress as he balanced on the cedar which swayed and teetered beneath them.

A great roar went up, cries of encouragement for the stranger, some shouts of admonition for their townsman. The Bull would have no cinch in this contest!

Now it was Webster who started the log, cautiously, slowly, watching Duval.

On the shore Bird-eye pranced up and down, swinging his arms.

"Duck him, Webster!" he yelled. "Duck the big chunk! Sure and he needs him a bath!"

The smooth bole gathered momentum swiftly and Webster began to skip and dance, breaking the steady measure of his run. As his weight came and went irregularly upon the cedar it commenced to teeter, causing Duval's flickering feet to splash at times in ankle-deep water. The Bull edged toward the middle and this maneuver let Webster's end sag, putting on his feet, in turn, the handicap of being submerged at every stride; so he, too, moved toward the center and there, elbows almost touching, they ran swiftly.

And, again without warning, the Bull leaped. He went higher, this time, but instead of driving his spikes into the far side of the log and stopping its spin as he had done before, he drove them into the near side and at once resumed his run, increasing rather than checking the momentum.

"Got you, big boy!" Webster cried as he, too, came down running.

Quick thinking; instantaneous action. To leap was simple; but to determine the opponent's move and meet it with complacence and poise was another matter. To have come down to a stance then would have flung him to wet defeat.

"Ah, th' big chunk av a Bull's goin' to get thut bath he needs!" Bird-eye shrilled into the roar.

But this was only his enthusiasm, his dislike for Duval at work. The outcome was far from a certainty. Tincup knew that; and Ben Webster knew it as well.

Without a flicker of warning Duval dropped the pick of his peavey, twisting the shaft in his hands, flipping the hook open. The point plunked into the water, the hook bit into the log simultaneously and as the handle swung upward in a swift arc the man drove his weight on it, throwing himself forward against the grip of his right hand. He bent his knees to take up some of the shock, his body twisted, he grunted and his face wrenched into a lightning expression of great strain, and the cedar, in a quarter turn, stopped dead. . . . . And Ben Webster, back bowed acutely, peavey high above his head, teetering back to balance on one foot, laughed aloud!

"Quick work, big boy!" he cried. "Almost got me!"

BUT Duval had nowhere near gotten him, he knew, and Webster's cry infuriated the man. He cursed sharply and spat and jerked at the brim of his slouch hat as he shook loose the peavey and commenced again to birl.

Now it was the stranger who became

the aggressor. He worked out and back, out toward the end of the log, back to its middle, dancing sideways, keeping the log rising and falling. He feinted to check and gave the stick an added impetus instead. He stopped it with his peavey, as neatly as the other had done. He leaped and checked it with his feet and had it going again so quickly that the Bull obviously was confused. He resumed his galloping tactics and the wavelets stirred by the teeter of the log washed the feet of the foremost rank of onlookers. But the Bull stuck like a burr.

They ran a moment easily, each waiting for the other to try some fresh trick. The Bull leaped and came down running; he leaped four times in the space of as many quick breaths. And then, as though ready to leap again, dropped the hook of his peavey into the cedar. He wavered when the handle, swept upward by the rush and weight of the spinning log, bore against his great palm. His body swung sharply to the left. He cursed as the smooth grip slipped from his clutch and Bird-eye Blaine danced in a frenzy of delight as the peavey, handle smacking the water, disappeared in the pond and the Bull, waving his arms for balance, ran the log desperately to hold his place. A great shout went up from the crowd.

Gone, now, the equal odds. Like a fencer with broken foil, like a boxer with one eye closed, like a runner with a strained tendon, was Duval. He realized it and was goaded to fury for as he ran the log and eyed Webster's grin his lips moved in unheard cursing.

"Polish him off, now!" Bird-eye screamed, like an audacious, saucy boy. "Polish him good, Misther Webster! He's yawpin' fer help and the' aint none fer him!"

That was what Tincup believed. A quick finish seemed certain, with the Bull so handicapped, without his peavey for offensive moves or to hold for balance. And a great, chesty demand rose to the blue skies, as a fight crowd howls for a knock-out when one contender grows groggy and cannot fend the assault of his adversary. But what happened stilled the clamor quickly, as though sound were a tangible mass and a great knife had sheared it quickly and cleanly.

Ben Webster shifted his peavey. He had held it across his body, arms wide spread. Now he swung the point upward and outward and as he ran the spinning log he drew it back and tossed it toward shore—high and far, sending with it his chance for a quick and certain victory!

THE silence was that of amazement. This was like letting a man you had knocked down get to his feet and have another chance; this was opportunity, handed to truculent Bull on a silver platter! This was the sportsmanship one read about! And then came an excited clatter of tongues, rising to an even greater roar. The outsider was through fooling, and through with strategy. He was going to run the Bull off his feet!

Fast and faster spun the log. Spray from it drenched the men to their knees, rained behind them into the pond. Webster still kept his face turned toward his opponent but the Bull, fists clenched, arms widely extended, only watched his opponent from the tail of his eye. Duval's chin was up, his shoulders rigid, and as these indications of strain became more evident movement as well as sound swept the crowd as the bodies of men swayed under the tensity of vicarious effort.

Rigidity ran from the Bull's shoulders down his back. He was upright, now, where Webster was poised forward. And his scowl was gone. His brows no longer gathered but were upraised, his eyes wide open in the distress of fatigue and he breathed through his mouth.

Webster's grin was higher than ever. His lips moved and a watcher might know that he planted good-natured gibes at the man whose crown was slipping. Nothing could save the king of the Shoestring; nothing in fairness.

Thought of the rules swept the crowd, now, because Duval was edging to the right. He moved slowly, awkwardly, at the cost of great effort, on toward the center of the log. Trying one more trick? Not likely! A man under such a strain does not attempt strategy—not fair strategy. As he progressed an inch at a time Webster countered by also creeping toward the center so his end might not dip beneath the surface.

Both men had their arms extended, now, and Webster's grin had faded to a sort of curious smile, a speculative alertness. . . . . Close and closer they came together and then, as their extended hands were all but touching, Duval flecked his wrist in a pass at Webster's hand.

"Ah, the dirty—" But Bird-eye's high scream was cut short by an ominous roar. The Bull, facing defeat, had overstepped all rules. The slightest touch on the other's body would upset his balance, now, and after Webster had proven himself above taking what was even recognized as a fair advantage the last vestige of sympathy for Duval was whisked away.

ON Duval's face appeared a look of ruthlessness along with the darkness of fatigue and humiliation. He would be the last man on that log, though disqualified for any prize. At any cost he would stay on that log.

But would he? Webster, a steely quality coming into his grin, retreated until he was out of the other's reach. The log sank below the surface under this shifting in its burden, but Webster did not slow his cadence despite the fact that he ran in water. He loosed the last reservoir of his energy and by the way his feet flickered and clawed and spurned that log one might well have believed that until now he had only played with this crowned king of the river.

Watchers felt their middles aching under the vicarious strain. Again the Bull sought to strike Webster's extended hand and missed by inches. His left hand raised jerkily, up and up. His body tilted. His great torso was twisting, wrenching at the hips and, seeing this, Webster leaped high, came down running, sent water sloshing back and forth the length of the stick and with a throaty cry of rage and humiliation, of hatred and jealousy, the great Bull, missing a stride, went sideways and backward, disappeared beneath the surface of the pond with a mighty splash and came up blowing and shaking his black-thatched head.

Hats went into the air, then, along with yips and yells and enthusiastic oaths as Ben Webster, panting heavily, brought the log to a stop and, hands on his knees, stood blowing and grinning and watched the man whose title he had taken swim for the boom sticks.

CHAPTER II

THE Bull slunk quickly toward the boiler room of the mill, water streaming from his pants and sleeves. The pond man threw out his pike-pole and

brought the cedar log to shore and there Birney, the announcer and master of ceremonies and what-not, greeted Webster with a clap on the back and, with the other hand, thrust a roll of currency at him.

"Here's your money and you sure deserve it!" he cried, close in Ben's ear. "You'd got it on a foul, anyhow. Better this way!"

Bird-eye grasped his hand and shook it with congratulations as profane as they were shrill. Others surged around the victor and Webster accepted this homage modestly.

"Luck!" he said to one enthusiastic well-wisher. "I got the breaks in luck."

He shouldered his way slowly to his pack-sack and, surrounded by admirers, with Bird-eye in the fore, changed to his shoes again. He had the usual run of questions to answer that is the lot of any winner in a spectacular contest and he did it with that amiable grin, with his marked modesty and yet with a winning frankness.

"Now," he said, finally, rising and drawing on his Mackinaw. "Where's the old-timer?"

He looked about for Don Stuart, craning his neck to see over the crowd which was now moving up toward Tincup's main thoroughfare.

Webster lifted him, flung him—Brandon went down into the half-thawed mire of the street.

"Who d'ye mean?" Bird-eye asked. "Owld Donny?"

"Yeah. Stuart. The old duffer's broke, on top of being sick, and I want to look out for him."

A man at his elbow said cautiously:

"I'm afeerd old Don wont do much visitin' in Tincup." Bird-eye turned to him inquiringly and the man nodded: "Brandon. He found him here while th' birlin' was goin' on. He's likely made other arrangements."

Bird-eye's face reflected concern; the other man's, a cynical acceptance of some unpleasant fact.

"The dirty stinker!" Bird-eye said beneath his breath. "So he's drivin' him out a'ready, is he? Well, the lowdown—"

"Who's driving him out?" Webster asked.

"Misther Brandon. You see, Americky moight be a free country but Tincup aint in it, thin. Owld Donny aint welcome here and 'tis likely he's got his orders to move on."

Webster hitched his pack-sack higher.

"What's this? Orders? What's wrong with him? Seemed like a harmless old gaffer to me. Bent on Tincup, too; wanted it like a little kid wants candy. Got my goat. . . . . Who's going to run him off?"

Bird-eye had hopped nimbly to the log. He stared, first, up the street toward the rows of false-fronted buildings which made up Tincup's business district; then in the other direction, toward the railroad station.

"Ah-ha!" he exclaimed. "Sure, it's Misther Brandon hisself who's a-runnin' owld Donny off!"

Webster craned his neck and could see, halfway to the depot, two men on the sidewalk. One was his companion in travel earlier that day; the other a man he had not seen before. The latter had Don Stuart by one arm but that contact was not the friendly assistance which Ben had offered the old fellow. The grip seemed, even at that distance, to possess a quality of firmness, of authority, perhaps of ruthlessness. As he looked, the feeble old man tried to draw away, but the other, adamant, scarcely hesitated in his progress toward the station.

"Train west's due now," Bird-eye said. "Sure, and pore owld Donny, he'll be a passenger. It's a cryin' shame, kapin' him away from Tincup so!"

Webster started forward. He replied

rather abstractedly to a shouted compliment and his smile was now fleeting. He strode on, Bird-eye at his heels, crossing the street, leaping to the high board sidewalk and swinging on after the pair he watched.

Webster came up to them just in time to hear Stuart gasp:

"—aint long to—live, Nick. I'd like—stay here. Aint pleasant to—be sick and not—among friends."

"Never mind," the other said as one might to a protesting child. "I've told you any number of times to stay away from this town."

On this reply Webster moved abreast of the man.

"Hello, old-timer!" he said, addressing Stuart. "Going some place?"

He did not look at the man said to be Nicholas Brandon. His manner on the question was almost casual.

"Oh—hello," Don panted. "I—Mr. Brandon, here—wont let me—stay."

Then Webster looked at Brandon. A man of indeterminate age; not old, neither young. Powerfully built, with a peculiarly white face and eyes as black as night. Those eyes bored into Webster's, now, keenly, intelligently, with the look of a man who is accustomed to gauging others without delay or hesitation; the eyes of a man who knows men, the glance of one accustomed to rule men.

"Oh, this man doesn't want you to stay!" Ben said softly. And then with a smile, to Brandon: "I sort of took the old-timer under my wing today. He wants to stay here quite badly. I'll look after him."

HIS eyes left that boring gaze and went to the pallid face of the old man and in them was a world of sympathy. Bird-eye had stopped a half dozen paces back and stood with thumbs in his suspenders, watching, with one eye malevolently half closed.

"There's no place for him here," Brandon said positively. He made no effort to be positive. His voice seemed naturally to fall into that tone. "Come, Stuart, it's almost train-time."

He twitched at the old man's arm but Ben broke in, brow wrinkled as if he wanted to handle a perplexing manner fairly.

"Well, now, say! No place? Suppose a place was made for him a few days? I'd sort of planned on that. There's a hotel here, and I'd be willing to—"

"I don't know you," Brandon interrupted, and now irritability was in the voice. "I've never even seen you. I've known this man for years. He's an old employee of mine. This is my affair. I never have others, especially strangers, meddling."

His pale cheeks colored slightly. A low whimper came from Stuart and Ben rubbed his chin with one knuckle.

"Yeah. I am butting in, I guess. But you see, the old-timer told me a little about himself. He's been lonesome a long time, I take it. He's not what you'd call in robust health. I figure that if I was in his shape I'd like to be with a few old friends myself and if—"

In the distance a train whistled and on the sound Brandon's eyes snapped.

"I've no time to argue my affairs with strangers!" he said sharply. "Come, Stuart!"

"But, Nick! . See—here, Nick—I'll never get back—again. It's lonesome, bein' sick—alone where you— Nick! You're—hurting my wrist!"

He winced from the clutch and on that the last shadow of smile went swiftly out of Ben Webster's face, the slightly apologetic look at interfering in a matter which was not strictly his affair left his eyes. He put himself squarely before Brandon.

"Let him go!" he said quietly, but his look was determined.

The man hesitated and flushed again.

"If you aren't looking for trouble," he said, voice edged with wrath, "you'll keep out of this!"

"Fair enough! But unless you've got a better reason than I know about, let the old-timer alone!"

"Young man, I'm not used to taking orders in Tincup!"

"Unless you've got a better reason than I know about, let the old-timer *alone!*" In the repetition was rising anger, now. "Let go his wrist!" he added sharply as Stuart winced again.

"I'll thank you to keep out of—"

"Let — go — his — *wrist*, you damned bully!"

He had grasped Brandon's fore arm with both hands, letting his pack slip to the sidewalk. The clutch on Don Stuart's arm loosened. With a snarl Brandon drew back and swung for Ben's jaw.

Webster ducked, swayed forward and with a dip of his supple body caught Brandon about the middle, drove his head into the man's chest, raised a knee to his groin, lifted him from his feet, swung, shoved and flung him free. . . .

With a sharp oath Brandon went down into the half-thawed mire of the street, sprawling on his back to turn over, lurch to his feet and rush for the sidewalk whence he had been flung.

Well! Men had been coming, edging cautiously near during the brief but obvious argument between Webster and Nicholas Brandon. But when Brandon, the man who ruled Tincup and its county, was seen lifted from his feet and tossed ignominiously into the mud, trampled by his horses, stirred by the wheels of his wagons and tractors, the street which led through his town, to the mill. . . . . Well, *then* they came a-running!

Bird-eye cackled an impudent laugh and turned to watch the faces of the vanguard who came to see their liege lord, sprawled in the mud there, scramble to his feet. Their boots resounded on the planks of the walk, their voices were raised in exclamations of incredulity. In two decades and more no man save Bird-eye Blaine had dared lift even his voice in Tincup in other than respect for Nicholas Brandon. And now this stranger had thrown him into the mud!

BUT Brandon was up, lurching for the sidewalk where Ben Webster stood, legs spread, fists clenched but with good humor repossessed and grinning as he had grinned at Bull Duval; grinning as a man who loves combat for its own sake—not as one who fights in red rage.

But his smile faded and his jaw settled as Brandon uplifted his face in that rush. Murder was there, in the black eyes, in the loose hanging of the lower lip, in the purple flush of his cheeks Murder, and no less! It was such a look as would stop most attackers, as would send less strong men scuttling. It affected Ben Webster, too, but only in that his smile disappeared entirely and he squared himself as one will who knows that a real emergency is at hand.

And as quickly as that homicidal look had come, it passed. Something like fear swept those eyes, driving it away. Not fear of this encounter, Ben knew; not fear of a stronger, younger man. Something else again; something entirely different. It was the sort of fear that comes from within; the kind of fear a man has for his own deeds and impulses.

Brandon halted abruptly. His fists relaxed into hands and with one of them he brushed rather aimlessly at mud on his sleeve. His breathing was quick and irregular and his flush was gone. His naturally pale face seemed even whiter.

A DOZEN men were close, then, holding back, watching, waiting, listening. Others were coming; many more, pounding over the walk, splashing through melting puddles, keyed to grand excitement. And as Brandon halted, looking up into Webster's face and evidently fighting for self-control, one of these new arrivals pushed to the front and came up importantly.

"What's the matter, Mr. Brandon?" he asked sharply, but with the sharpness of one ready to render service.

Brandon did not reply at once. He settled his coat on his shoulder.

"Sheriff, arrest this young man," he said then. "I'll swear to a complaint of assault and battery myself."

A sigh of relief, of disappointment, of relaxing tension, or of all of these combined, went up from the growing group. The Sheriff turned to Webster and plucked his sleeve.

"You'd better come along, Webster," he said. "You took in too much territory." Even so soon was the new hero of the town accosted sternly by the Tincup law!

Ben looked about, rather foolishly He was embarrassed and surprised. He had expected a fight in what he considered a righteous cause and had the air of one who would have been on familiar ground in such an encounter. But instead a sheriff was plucking at his sleeve!

He laughed a bit sheepishly.

"All right, Sheriff. If it's arresting you run to here in Tincup, likely I'm it!"

He turned for his pack-sack, and as he did so observed old Don Stuart sitting weakly on the step of the vacant store building before which the scene had been enacted. Perspiration beaded his waxen face and his quick breath came through open, colorless lips. He was obviously a very sick man and trouble showed in Webster's eyes, wiping out any concern for his own predicament.

"Minute, Sheriff," he said and crossed to Don, meanwhile thrusting one hand into a pocket.

"Here, old-timer," he said gently. The hand came out and into Stuart's palm he pressed a thin packet of bills and some change. "Get one of your old buddies . . . . Here, you!"—straightening and beckoning Bird-eye, who approached with alacrity. "Get the old-timer to a hotel. Better get a doctor, too. He's heeled enough to take care of himself a few days. After that . . . . we'll see."

He turned then and fastened a severe gaze on Brandon.

"And you, chum, let him alone!" he warned. "Until a doctor says he can travel, you watch your step with him!"

Brandon deigned no reply. He was buttoning his coat, pushing his way through the group which fell aside respectfully.

"All right, Sheriff," said Ben to that worthy. "Let's go!"

CHAPTER III

ABEL ARMITAGE, justice of the peace in Tincup, looked over his spectacles into the face of the prisoner before him and a twinkle appeared in his keen blue eyes. He cleared his throat and it might have seemed to an observer that he was about to chuckle. But he did not. He simply asked:

"Now, young man, you're charged with assault and battery on the person of Nicholas Brandon. Are you guilty?"

Immediately after putting this formal and required question Abel blew his nose, at length and violently, and his face behind the snow-white handkerchief, framed as it was in equally snow-white hair, grew red indeed, as a man's will when he blows his nose violently or when he represses laughter at the cost of great effort.

From the rear windows of his cluttered little office Abel had watched young Ben Webster emerge from the status of a complete stranger to that of the town's latest hero by sending Mr. Bull Duval to a damp and ignominious finish in the log birling. After that he had returned to the creaking swivel chair behind the table which did service as a bar of justice and a desk and a repository for his feet, picked up an old clarinet which had lain upon it while he watched the demonstration of Webster's agility, and commenced to play a halting, aimless and not wholly musical tune.

This was entirely normal. Much business was transacted in that office, but always in a peculiar manner and with distinctive tempo. Besides the court matters, other and even more portentous affairs centered here. But this practice of Abel's of producing these wheezy and not always melodious sounds on the ancient instrument consumed many hours each week. Still, he was no idler as he coaxed the instrument to vibration. He scowled now and then and his sharp eyes were most keen, indicating that he wrestled with a tangled problem even as the clarinet squawked. Occasionally he tilted his head to re-read the footings of columns of figures on sheets of paper at his elbow.

He was so occupied either with the musical performance or with his thoughts that he did not hear the tramp of many feet on the walk outside and was unaware that he was about to be called on to function in an official capacity. When the door opened, though, and Ben Webster, Hickens the sheriff, and Nicholas Brandon, followed, it seemed by the total male population of the county, surged in through the doorway, the clarinet's squawking leaped into a shrill squeal and stopped short. The white-crowned head of the old justice cocked itself so that he might peer over the rims of his spectacles and for a moment he held that posture. Then the reed came out of his lips, his feet dropped to the floor and he swung his chair to face the entrance.

The Sheriff stated his errand, the complaint was drawn, Nicholas Brandon affixed his signature and then for the first time Abel looked closely into the face of the defendant.

IT was a long and searching look and was met steadily by a pair of clear, steel-gray eyes which seemed, on careful inspection, to be struggling to hold back an expression that might, had it developed, have proven to be a mischievous smile!

When Abel decided on this he next looked at the black countenance of the complaining witness and as he did so the first intimation of that threatening chuckle appeared on his face. He held it back, however, and put his question.

As the crowd waited for Webster's re-

sponse the tensity that was upon the place became badly evident. Necks were craned, men stood on tiptoe, none moved that they might hear. This, when a man was charged with simple assault and battery! Still, the offense had been committed against Nicholas Brandon. That made the affair momentous.

complaint again. "Mr. Ben Webster, how come that you go about the country tossing respected citizens into the mud?"

Ben looked hard at the old man, for the question had been put in a voice that certainly was no less than severe.

"Why, he was trying to make a friend of mine do something he didn't want to

"You'd better come along, Webster," the Sheriff said. "You took in too much territory."

"Are you guilty or not?" Abel repeated.

"Well, if pitching a man off the sidewalk into the mud is called assault and battery in Tincup, then I'm about a hundred per cent guilty," Ben admitted.

A stir in the room followed that and Abel frowned, a convincingly judicial frown.

"Guilty, eh?" He cleared his throat at length. "Now how about this disruption of the peace, anyhow?"

The Sheriff spoke:

"You see, Abel, 'twas this way. Mr.—"

"Now just a minute, Art. This accused has pleaded guilty, as I understand it. I don't see any need of anybody else saying anything. He's thrown himself on the mercy of this court, you might say, and it's regular and proper and according to the spirit of the statute that I question him before passing sentence. Besides," he added, with a twinkle at Brandon, "I'm a little curious."

The Sheriff sniffed and subsided. Clearly, there was little friendship between him and the justice.

"Now, Mr.—er—" Abel glanced at the

do. That's all. I butted in, I guess; he got hard, and so"—shrug—"I lost my head for a minute and put him in his place."

"In the mud, you mean."

"Yeah. In the mud."

Pause, and Ben again studied that ruddy, white-fringed face, trying to find some indication of the good nature he had believed was there a moment before.

"Well, go on, go on. Go back to the beginning. I want to know all about this affair."

"I started for Tincup several days ago. I was a long ways off, over in Minnesota. This morning I got down to the junction west of here and while I waited for my train got talking to this old-timer Don Stuart, who was in the station. Maybe you know him, Judge—other folks here do."

Abel blinked hard. "The old fellow is about all in, I'd say," Ben added. "He's got it into his head that he's about to die and probably his guess isn't such a bad one. Seems this used to be his stamping ground, that he's been away a long time and that he'd started back to finish

his days here where he could see some old friends. He went broke on the way and was just sitting there this morning waiting for something to happen. I happened. I wasn't any too well heeled myself, but I had enough for his ticket, so I brought him along. I expect lots of other men would feel sorry for an old-timer in his fix. Of course, not all men would." He looked sideways at Brandon, and smiled a trifle.

"As luck would have it, I got a chance to pick up a few dollars of Tincup money as soon as we got in, and I had to have it, with the old-timer on my hands. While I was busy getting this cash, this man Brandon evidently saw my buddy and started rushing him back to the depot to take the next train back to where he came from. I didn't like that so well. I tried to talk him out of it, but Mr. Brandon isn't a great talker. That's all. . . . . Here I am!"

"Guilty as charged, eh?" Abel fumbled with the papers. "What brought you such a long ways into Tincup, anyhow?"

He looked up with this query and his eyes were very sharp.

"Because I'd heard Tincup was a tough nut to crack."

A stir in the crowd, then, a sharp look from Brandon to Webster.

"Oh! Fond of nuts, are you?" Abel asked, and the look in his eyes was much less severe. "So you'd heard about Tincup and started for it from a long ways off and— Now this matter of nuts: you like all kinds? Or what's your favorite?"

The other considered this question with great if not wholly genuine seriousness.

"Since you're interested in my preferences in nuts, Your Honor, I'd say the best nut that ever hung outdoors or offered itself for the cracking was a good old hickory nut."

"Real tough ones, eh?"

"Real tough ones, yes."

ABEL leaned back and rocked in his swivel chair, which creaked wailingly, hands crossed on his plump stomach. He wiped his face with a palm and wet his lips. The two looked long at one another and that spark passed which will jump from man to man, carried sometimes by a deed, often by a word, frequently by only a glance; that message which says as plainly as though inscribed in black characters against white background: "I like you; I am your friend. We think alike!" It went from the old man to the young and back again from young to old while the onlookers became a bit restless at all this by-play in a court of law. Nicholas Brandon, however, understood, and his dark eyes flashed.

"And so you'd figured Tincup as a sort of hickory nut?"

"I had."

"How'd you arrive at that conclusion?"

Webster rubbed his chin once more.

"Tincup has a reputation all through the Lakes States. Wherever you go, you'll hear it talked about as a hard camp. I'd heard so many times that a good man with ideas of his own, with independence and, maybe, with ambition, had better keep away from here that I found myself hankering to get a look at the place."

"What's your line of work?"

"I follow the timber—anything."

"Well, just what, for instance? What are some of the jobs you've held?"

Webster smiled a bit.

"Good many. I was a chore-boy once; another time I was a road-monkey. I've teamed and sawed, worked as millwright and on rivers. Once or twice I've run a camp or two."

"But your avocation, I take it, is looking for hard nuts?"

BRANDON spoke now:

"Your Honor!" His voice was well-modulated, and yet beneath its surface was something which seemed like iron covered with velvet. "As complaining witness in this case, may I suggest that we are beginning to waste time? This young man has pleaded guilty. Of course, I do not want to be put in the light of one who attempts to dictate to a court of law, but I have pressing matters, and if we can get on—"

Outwardly only a suggestion, a plea; really, though, his way of demanding, of giving an order. And in his reference to his humility before the court, a sting of irony as if he had only contempt for such men and institutions as these before him.

"Yes, you're a busy man, Nick," Abel said, and nodded. "I'd sort of figured being busy here today, myself. Sort of wondered if somebody wouldn't bring in Bull Duval on a charge of assault and battery. He trimmed my man Harrington so badly that he's gone, and my operation's without a walking-boss today. I

sort of thought, being interested as you are in law and order, Duval might be brought in."

"That is something I know nothing about," Brandon said severely.

"Likely not. You can't be expected to keep as close track of the men who work for you as I do of mine. That is, it isn't reasonable to think a man of your caliber would."

He spoke dryly, and Webster, watching the two, could see that his words stung Brandon furiously. The justice straightened in his chair, however.

"But maybe we are delaying things.

"Now, Mr. Webster, don't you think it a little out of the way to come into a town, a total stranger, and upset all that town's precedents? If you, instead of one of Mr. Brandon's hired men, had cleaned up on my man Harrington, it might not have been such a grave offense. But here you come and pick out the one man in Tincup who hasn't been struck or even threatened in longer than I can recall, a man who is regarded here about like most folks would regard a king, and toss him out into the mud! Why, Webster, that's not *ever* happened before!

"Even if you had pleaded not guilty, evidence is all against you. Why, there's still mud on the seat of Mr. Brandon's pants!"

A quick shifting of bodies, and Brandon's lips tightened as men stared at his nether garments.

"Probably it didn't hurt Nick much, but there are his feelings to consider. There are always people in a town who are ready to jeer at a man behind his back. Aren't you ashamed of giving them a chance to jeer at Mr. Brandon?"

Webster looked at Brandon, then, deliberately, carefully, inspecting him from his glossy black hair to his muddied breeches.

"It wasn't a very wise thing to do, I guess," he admitted. "It's not likely, now, that I'll even get a chance to see how hard a nut this town really is."

"And no more than you deserve!" Abel said sharply. "You know better than to carry on that way, Webster. I've got to give you a fine commensurate with your offense. I'll fine you a dollar and seventy-five cents for costs, or send you to jail for a day."

In the rear a sacrilegious titter or two. From the Sheriff, a grunt; from Nicholas Brandon a breath of offended dignity and a look that scorched. But on Ben Webster's face only appeared a foolish smile.

"That's reasonable enough," he said, "but the joker is this: I haven't even got the dollar! I'm down to these!" He exhibited a few coins on his great palm.

Abel's tongue was roving his lips as if speculatively, and his eyes were twinkling not with mirth this time, but with a high light indicative of inspiration.

"Well, our jail's real comfortable, I'm told. A day there'll let you think over the advisability of going around the country muddying up the pants of respected citizens!"

Webster, though, faced even so short a jail sentence with anything but relish.

"I can get the money easy enough," he said,—"that is if you, Your Honor, or somebody else'll send a wire for me."

"That might be arranged. Where to?"

"Here—" He reached for a sheet of paper and pencil lying on the table. Swiftly he wrote the words: *"Badger Forest Products Co., Beech Ridge, Wisconsin."* He handed it to Abel. "Will you wire them for twenty-five dollars and sign my name? Send the message collect."

"That's a big outfit," the Judge said. "You figure they'll do as you ask?"

"Well, they never *have* turned me down for anything I've asked. Of course, there's always the first time. If you'll do that. . . . .

"Until an answer comes, Sheriff, I suppose it's me for the brig. . . . . Is that right, Judge?"

Abel was studying the address, and when he looked up and grunted an affirmative reply, his gaze was far away.

CHAPTER IV

FOR a considerable interval after his courtroom had emptied, Abel Armitage sat motionless in his chair. He did not move much; his eyes still held that far-away look. Then suddenly he picked up the clarinet and began tooting.

But there were gaps in the melody he strove to approximate, long pauses when he sat staring into space, and now and again he picked up the scrap of paper bearing the address young Webster had written out, and scanned it closely.

"By cracky!" he said, an hour after being left alone. "By cracky—by jing! It might *be,* you know. It may be, possibly, perhaps might *be!"*

Thereupon he rose, went to a wall telephone and turned the crank. It was some moments before he prevailed on the attentions of central, and when he did succeed, put in a call for Mr. Bridger, the general manager of the Badger Forest Products Company, of Beech Ridge, Wisconsin.

After this he stood for a time in the front window, peering out into the street. A man came along the sidewalk, a man of about Abel's years, bearing a limp and rusty bag which stamped him as a physician. He waved a hand to Abel, and then, as on sudden remembrance, changed his course and approached the entry.

"Big day, Abel!"—as the justice opened the door.

"Yeah. Big."

"Old Don's back."

"So I heard."

"Bad shape, too."

"I heard that. Real bad, Emory?"

Emory Sweet nodded gravely.

"Heart's like a sponge. He can't last long. Nick was all for sending him back to Hemlock, but I told him it would be murder to move him now."

"Oh, Nick showed up, did he?"

"Came right from here. Said he'd been providing for Don for these last years and wanted him with somebody or other in Hemlock who'd see he didn't get hold of hooch again. Was quite provoked when I opposed moving him."

They looked at one another and both smiled grimly.

"Nicholas doesn't like the notion of Don's being in this vicinity," said Abel.

"It's about as popular with him as smallpox. When I'd prevailed on him to let Don alone, I told him the truth: that he can't last more than a few weeks at the outside. Nick looked like a man who —well, like one who's heard good news."

Abel nodded. "Safer having him in his grave than even miles away from anybody who's likely to remember and bring the subject up. But when old Don goes, seems like the last chance of ever clearing the thing up's gone too."

"Looks that way. Unless he'll talk before he dies."

"Even so, it wouldn't amount to much. He's an old bum; he was a known drunkard at the time. It happened so long ago, and with the courts controlled by who they are—"

"All but yours."

"And mine without any jurisdiction in sure-enough trouble."

The Doctor started out but halted in the doorway.

"Hear Harrington's gone."

"Yes. The Bull ran him out of town."

"Brandon?"

"Don't be simple, Emory. Who else?"

"He certainly can't forget the Hoot Owl, can he? What are you going to do now, Abel?"

The other shook his head gravely.

"I wish I could give you an answer— or myself an answer. All forenoon I've had a feeling in that palm,"—extending his creased right palm—"as if the end of a rope were slipping through it."

AN hour later Abel Armitage left his office. He moved with great alacrity for one of his years, and once on the street, had not even passing interest for the tug-of-war in progress. He stopped just once and that was to draw Bird-eye Blaine from the throng of onlookers that lined the sidewalk.

"Got your car in town, Bird-eye?" he asked. "Have? Will it still run?"

"Run!"—as though insulted. "Say, Abel, thut car may not be so foxy-*lookin'* as some, but she's got a heart av gold, and—"

"All right. Run her around by the jail, will you? Might need you; again, I might not. Best to be prepared, though."

Bird-eye nodded assent, and the old justice went on. . . . .

Ben Webster, solitary prisoner in the county jail, was lying on the least objectionable of the bunks he found there, smoking and staring at the dingy ceiling. His hands were clasped beneath his head, and his feet were crossed—an attitude of relaxation, surely, but his one foot twisted on its ankle, around and around, most restlessly. A man of action, this, not accustomed to idleness or restraint.

He raised his head sharply when a key grated in the big steel door leading to the cell block, and stopped puffing on his pipe when the opening barrier revealed old Abel Armitage standing beside the Sheriff's wife.

"Of course it's regular, Mrs. Hickens,"

he was saying. "This case was in my court, and besides, the money to pay the fine and costs is in my pocket now."

His eyes were twinkling and he turned them from the woman to the man emerging from one of the four small cells.

Bright November afternoon sunlight streamed through the dusty, barred windows, and standing in it Ben Webster seemed to be taller, broader, cleaner than he had been when he appeared in Abel's little courtroom.

"Hello, Judge!" he cried, and grinned good-naturedly at the older man.

Abel wasted no time.

"I've just been talking with Bridger."

"Bridger! He here?"

"Oh, no. I called him on long distance," Abel smiled as the other gave a puzzled frown. "Bridger and I are old friends. We fought Spain together—and yellow fever when we had Spain whipped. I think a lot of Bridger. I've a great respect for him and his opinions."

"So've I. Everybody has."

"Hum-m! He says you're no good."

Webster started. "Wha-a-at? Why—that's funny! Do you mean he wouldn't stake me to the money I asked for?"

"Oh—that! I don't know. I didn't ask; I forgot it. I wasn't interested in your fine. We can take care of that. I was interested in finding out about you—what kind of nut-cracker you are."

The young gray eyes were studying the old blue ones closely now.

"I found out," Abel continued. "He says you're no good." In the pause the justice chuckled softly. "He says you're absolutely no good to yourself or anybody else. He tells me that you know more about logging and sawmills than any man your age has a right to know, and he's seen a lot of men. He says you can make the worst crew that ever infested a shanty eat out of your hand. He says you're Scotch when it comes to dealing for anybody else, and a drunken sailor with your own money. He says you don't know what it is to be tired or afraid. . . . . And then he says again that you're no use on earth, so far as he can tell!"

WEBSTER was grinning a bit foolishly now, and rubbed his chin in that characteristic way with one knuckle.

Abel went on.

"He told me that before the war—your war, not his and mine—they'd figured you as one of the prize young men in their organization, but that since you've come back there's nothing you'll do. You *can* do anything, he says, but you wont. I asked him why, and he said he guessed it was because everything they had to offer you was too simple, which I translated to mean that they haven't a good, tough hickory nut in need of cracking."

The other's rather embarrassed smile faded.

"Was he—mad?" he asked. "Was he really sore at me?"

"Mad like anybody else would be, I take it, if they saw a young man they thought a lot of wasting his time."

"I'm sorry! I think a lot of Mr. Bridger. He certainly has been white with me. I've tried, Judge. Honest, I've tried to give 'em all I had, but. . . . . But he's right. I haven't got my feet on the ground yet. After the big show, everything else seems too damned easy!"

"Likely. You haven't tried my job yet," Abel said gravely.

"Being a justice in Tincup?"

"No, not that. That's just a little vanity; I'm just holding that to show the powers that be that *all* the old guard isn't dead politically yet. My real job—my real, tough nut—is being administrator for an estate. The McManus estate, which is nothing more than as pretty a piece of hardwood as ever stood outdoors. The Hoot Owl stuff, we call it. Trying to operate it to a profit and hang on as administrator so some man wont step in and give that stuff away is my particular hard nut. And it's a chore, Webster."

He eyed the younger man a brief interval and caught his breath quickly.

"I liked the way you looked at Nick Brandon in court this forenoon. No young man has looked at him that way since I can remember. That's why I telephoned Bridger—because I liked the way you looked at Nick and because I'm about worn out trying to crack a hard nut. That's why I'm here.

"Maybe, from what Bridger told me, and from what I've seen of you, you might maybe, perhaps, possibly like to take a crack at this nut."

After a moment he repeated:

"You might maybe, perhaps, possibly. The fact is, I'm through, Webster. I've given the job all I had. I'm at my wit's end, and the estate's at its rope's end. We're licked, as we stand now, and the

fact is that I'm here, an old man, and I might do a right fair job of *begging* you to try this nut!"

HE was profound, now, and the quality of his mood, so direct, so simple and sincere, touched the younger man. He did not speak but watched Abel as he fumbled in his pocket for a sketch map.

"Come over by the window. Now, here's the layout!"—spreading the map on the sill. "Here's the railroad, main line. This is Hoot Owl siding with our mill. Twenty men there, some living in shanties, and boarding-house taking care of the rest. It's a long, narrow strip, you see; seventy-six forties uncut. Four miles of slash to the north of the mill. Our railroad goes up through the chopping, so. We've an old coffee-pot of a twenty-ton rod engine and Russell cars, all more or less ready for junk. Here's the camp now, and we're cutting on the second forty north. Got forty hands there that pass for men.

"Harrington was handling it for me. Man named Buller's millwright, and a fellow named Ruppert's straw boss at camp. Harrington's—thanks to the work of your friend, Duval—gone, and we're in the soup!"

He paused and looked at Webster, whose keen eyes were studying the detail of the map.

"It's a haywire outfit. The locomotive broke down yesterday, and unless the boys get her working, the mill will be out of logs in a week. The mill itself is a grand old ruin, but saws after a fashion. The lumber in the yards is mortgaged up to the last cull piece; there's not enough in the bank to meet interest and pay-roll; and there's no boss on the job."

Webster looked at the old man.

"You said it was as pretty a piece of hardwood as ever stood outdoors. If so, why's it in this jam?"

Abel Armitage lifted a hand in gesture and whispered sharply one word:

"Brandon!"

BEN put down the map, replaced his pipestem between his teeth and shoved his hands deep into his pockets.

"Brandon, eh?" He nodded. "Checks out on the stories I'd heard. . . . . So Brandon's put you on the toboggan, eh?"

"Just as he's put every other man on

the toboggan who's tried to compete with him in this country for years! Man after man has given him a fight, and every blessed one of 'em's fallen down. This Hoot Owl stuff is the last left in the county that Brandon doesn't control, and he wants it more than he's ever wanted anything else in his life."

"Why?"

Abel shrugged. "Probably because it's kept itself out of his hands for so long. . . . . And, besides, there are other reasons.

"Six years ago I was made administrator of this estate, and to save the thing from eating its head off with interest I started to operate. I wont go into history further than that, now. There wasn't a chance to sell. Nobody's going to put their money into a devil-ridden county like this! There are too many stories going round of what's happened to others who have tried to work alongside Nick Brandon! We had to cut and mill, or sell to Brandon at his own price. Maybe, if it had been mine, I'd have done it; but the owner of this timber is an orphan girl, and—a man doesn't like to quit under those circumstances.

"But every man I've put on to run the

"Throw me out?" he cried. "Why, kid, you couldn't—" He got just that far, when a fist bashed into his lips.

thing has been beaten, and I've had some good ones there! They can't get decent crews in the first place. Buller the millwright, Thomas the camp cook, and a crazy Irishman named Bird-eye Blaine who's barn-boss, are the only three men you can count on. Brandon takes the good men who come along; and if they wont work for him, he sees to it that his Bull Duval drives 'em out of the country. And this matter of labor is only one item that he makes hard to supply."

THE old man's voice had commenced to tremble a bit on this recital. He paused and drew a long breath, as though to steady himself.

"Until now he hasn't been able to touch me. I've managed to hold out against him politically. But he's watching and the probate court is watching, and unless I show some progress by the first of the year I'm going to be booted out as administrator. With another administrator he'll buy this timber for a song, an orphan girl will be robbed, and the shame of this community will be complete!"

"So he bullies old men and picks on little girls!" Webster mused.

"Well, Dawn isn't so little—"

"And what makes you think," Webster interrupted, "that I've got a chance to put it over when other men have failed?"

Abel did not hesitate:

"Because you have youth and a liking for tough nuts!" He did not smile; his eyes snapped and his voice rose. "You've had experience; you aren't afraid of Nick Brandon; perhaps you wont even take him with enough seriousness; you know both ends of the woods' operation; and last and most important of all, you came to Tincup, hunting trouble!"

"Son,"—putting a hand on his shoulder, "I'd take Bridger's word on men quicker than I'd take the word of any man I know. He says you can do it if you will. I'm asking you, now, as an old man with his back to the wall, will you help me on this?"

Ben Webster did not answer at once. He was staring at the floor as one will when debating with himself and preparing for argument with another. He twisted his head gravely and smiled. Then he looked into Abel's face.

"When do we start?" he asked.

CHAPTER V

IT was just before whistle time at the Hoot Owl mill.

"Who's the young feller with Abel?" the trimmer-man asked the filer.

"New boss."

"Him?" The trimmer-man spat and leaned farther forward for a better look at Ben Webster as he stood talking to the sawyer in the gloom of early day. "Say—aint he the lad that ducked the Bull? And took a poke at Brandon?"

"The same."

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"So'll he, likely." The filer, a cynic, chuckled mirthlessly. "Come out yesterday toward evenin' with Abel. Went back to the swamp and give things the once-over. Then set up half the night talkin' with Buller. He may be good, but—"

Ah, that ominous *but!*

And the decker was nodding and grinning at the pond man outside.

"Only a kid," the latter muttered. "He may be a good hand on a birlin' log, but wont Nick Brandon find him sweet pickin'! He likes 'em young, Nick does—and specially after this one took such pains to make himself onpopular with Mr. Nick!"

"Yup. He'll be duck soup for Brandon all right!"

The engineer was prophesying in similar vein to a teamster—and a lumber piler, looking in on the locomotive engineer who was working on his broken-down machine, echoed the pessimism of the rest of the crew.

The hand of the millwright's watch approached the hour. The sawyer pulled the signal cord. The big shaft commenced to turn, and from machine to machine went Buller, while Abel and Ben watched, examining belting, grease cups, seeing that live rollers ran steadily and true. The pulleys turned slowly for a full five minutes, and then as the cracked whistle atop the boiler-house cackled its message that another working day had begun, the carriage swept forward, and the saw snarled its way into a good maple log. Webster stirred on his feet. The way a mill should start, anyhow!

BUT after that beginning the procedure was not so good. The sawyer was not quick in making decisions. Twice in a half-dozen logs his slabs were thick to the point of waste; he did not turn one particularly good piece as soon as he should to grade his lumber to the highest point. He passed the log each way farther than was essential, too, and the come-back after the final board had been kicked off was not characterized with that verve which saves time and makes money.

The setter, too, was mediocre. He swore as he rode the knees back after a log was finished, and his movements were not lively. The deck man loafed and let the bull-chain fill up even when his deck was half empty.

The mill crew was not happy. They were men working for a cause they felt was lost—just hanging on for a few days, a few weeks. They had not that drive which either success of the undertaking in which they are a part or the best type of leadership can inspire.

Ben went with Buller, then, from man to man and watched each do his work. Whenever he left an individual, he was conscious that the man's gaze followed him, skeptically, appraisingly, not with any show of enthusiasm.

In the yard they passed logs rolled to one side.

"Much veneer stuff good as that?" Ben asked, eying them.

"Not much coming in now, but there's a lot of it yonder," Buller answered. "Buyer in here ten days ago looking up bird's-eye maple and veneer birch. Harrington was saving it as it came in—some of it. He had too many things to think about, Harrington did. The buyer's due back any day, though. Market's up, I guess."

Then he went on to the particular problem confronting them. With the locomotive laid up, the steady supply of logs from camp to mill would be cut off. Snow was falling lightly now, but sleighing might be days off. To log the mill by trucks was impracticable, he said, and unless the railroad equipment could be put in working condition, they might be forced to shut down. Fortunately a reserve supply

of a sort was on hand, decked high beside the pond.

"We'll have to break out this one deck now," Buller said. "Pond's about empty."

He whistled and waved to the pond man. Picking up a peavey he led the way toward that high bank of maple, beech and birch logs. It towered well over thirty feet in height, and in it was enough to run the mill into the fourth day, Ben calculated. He followed, watching the foreman as he surveyed the face of the deck and shook his head dubiously.

"Try the big birch first," Buller said to the pond man.

THEY engaged the hooks of their peaveys; they heaved. The log rolled away easily and lumbered down the incline to the water. Another—and still another, each coming away separately and starting no movement of others above them.

Buller spat. "That damn' beech butt's in tight," he said, tapping the log with his peavey pick. "Try her, Jim; now be careful. When she comes, the deck'll move in a hurry!"

They heaved to no result. With a sharp *"Now!"* they heaved again, both putting one foot against the log and swaying back against the peaveys. But the beech, nestling in the face of the deck at the height of a man's hip, refused to budge.

"Hold on! Give you a hand." Ben picked up a peavey and approached.

"Here, take this end, Webster," the foreman said, moving in toward the center, which was under the towering façade of the deck.

"No, go on back. I'll do the risk-taking for this lay-out for a while."

Buller made no reply, but grinned. The pond man looked at Ben and spat on his hands. Peavey-hooks clasped the log's ends again; a peavey pole with all Ben Webster's strength bearing on it, pried beneath the center of the reluctant beech . . . . "Now . . . . To*gether!"*

He lifted his weight from the ground. His peavey handle bent.

"Look out!" Buller's voice was shrill on the warning as movement sent Ben Webster swinging to the right. The beech log stirred. It seemed suddenly to squeeze out of the deck's face as though elastic. A heavy rustle came from the logs. The key-stick popped out, all but upon Ben. The logs above settled with a heavy mutter, and then with that thunderous, ringing booming sound of hardwood timber, they rolled upon him!

Webster had dropped his peavey, leaped nimbly over the beech as it struck and bounced on its way to the water. He had no time to turn and take to the pond himself, the avalanche started so quickly—no time to run either right or left and escape that thundering cataract of threatening death!

Instead, he faced it, eyes alert, head thrust forward. He hopped to the first log that bounced for him and spurned it with his one foot, landed on the following with both, hesitated a split instant and stepped to yet another.

Arms spread, balancing carefully, watching those logs as a boxer watches his opponent's blows, he went up that zooming, booming cataract as it came down. He danced to the left when the end of one stick swung out as if to clout him to a pulp. He ran rapidly over three that lumbered down beneath him and paused.

Two came riding together, one atop the other, a moving barrier as high as his waist. Buller opened his lips in a cry of warning, but thrusting out one hand, touching the topmost of the pair ever so lightly, Ben vaulted over it, landing on another that rolled and grumbled behind the two.

He moved away from the pond as rapidly as the logs moved toward it, and so his position in relation to the water did not change much. But he climbed—climbed continually up the moving face of that pile. In every second his life was assailed! Crevasses between logs opened and closed before him. Sticks popped out of the tremendous pressure and rolled down slantwise, imperiling him. A crooked log turned its bow outward as though to present an impassable obstacle, but he skipped sidewise and leaped its end. He did not run rapidly. At times he seemed to move with painful, with dangerous deliberation. But he was watching the logs and his chances, and did not make a move until he was certain of where he was going. . . . .

The decker was hanging out of the mill; the engineer stood in the doorway. The lumber-pusher and two pilers watched from the tram. The locomotive engineer removed his pipe and cursed sharply, and old Abel Armitage stood with one hand

upraised, making strange sounds in his throat.

Slowly the deck settled. Half of what had been piled logs now bobbed and swayed and rolled in the pond. The rest, reduced by half from the height to which it had towered a few seconds before, came to rest. And Ben Webster on its lowered crest stood still a moment until certain the movement was ended and then came slowly down, looking not at the men who gaped at him, but at the logs, over which he walked with a critical, appraising eye.

"Atta *boy!*" an unidentified voice yelled above the roar of the carriage exhaust, but if Webster heard this, he gave no indication.

"Now, if Buller can't get that locomotive going by noon," he said to the pale and visibly shaken Abel, "we'll telegraph for a new spider. No use taking more chances. Come on, Buller, let's look at the stuff you've got piled."

Blinking, the millwright followed him.

"Good Lord!" muttered the pond man. "Slick-shod he went over that face! Slick-shod!"

In the crêpe rubber soles of his pacs, Ben Webster had done what would have been a feat for an expert in calked river boots. . . . . And had immediately gone on about another phase of his job as though such spectacular activity were all in a day's work!

AN hour later the mill stood silent for five minutes while a broken conveyor chain was repaired. In that interval every man on the job had the story.

"Slick-shod!" the pond man said again and again. "Cool? Like a watermelon on ice!"

When they started again, the head sawyer was grinning, and it seemed as though the saw stayed in the log more constantly than it had before, as if the mill functioned with greater smoothness; a vague new enthusiasm went into the labor along with brawn and experience.

CHAPTER VI

NOT so in the camp where men and horses toiled to make decks of logs by night out of what at dawn had been standing trees.

Nearly half the crew were Finns, stolid, uncommunicative fellows, good enough workmen but difficult to speed up. A half-dozen Indians were there, a brace of French Canadians and a sprinkling of native stock; but these last were low-grade, unreliable loggers, come to Hoot Owl because for one reason or another they had been barred from the Brandon camps and were not of enough importance to be herded out of the country.

"Aren't there any good men left loose around here?" Ben asked Abel on his first trip to town.

"Few." The Judge shook his head. "Good workers, lots of 'em. But Brandon keeps hold of them. He treats them well; he's nobody's fool. But if a good man crosses him—out of the region he goes!

"Old Tim Jeffers is the only man who's stood out against Nick, and he's only won what you might call a moral victory. He's the best logger these woods have ever seen, but he doesn't like Nick Brandon, can't work for him and is so disgusted that he's quit the timber, settling down on a farm over by Mad Cat. He hasn't set foot in camp for three years and swears he never will again. Neither will he be run out of the country."

Ben watched the snow, which had been falling steadily for three days.

"Ought to have a new straw boss for camp. That crew needs riding if they're going to produce. More than I can do—pound those Finns on the tail, keep an eye on that joke of a mill and then try to sell lumber. Ruppert means well, but he doesn't know how." Ruppert was the camp foreman.

"That's part of the hard shell of this nut, Ben: lack of good men who've got the sand to stick here and work for anybody but Brandon."

THEY talked, then, of other component parts of that hard nut, principally of finances, and as Ben drove back to camp, he kept figures turning over and over in his head. They had a desperately narrow margin, with notes due, pay-roll to meet, and neither camp nor mill functioning as they should.

On Sunday morning he sat over a table in his tiny office working at this puzzle with paper and pencil when Bird-eye Blaine burst in.

"The Bull's here!" the little Irishman

exclaimed in a whisper, closing the door behind him hastily. "The Bull's here—an' wearin' his river boots!"

"Yeah?" This agitation did not disturb Webster, who looked up from his work with that frown which the financial situation had stamped on his brows.

"The *Bull!*" Bird-eye repeated, and swallowed. "He's come, loike he's come to other camps. He'll have eviry domned Finlander an' Injun hittin' the road to escape him!"

Ben shoved back his chair then. "What's this?"

"Ah, it's Brandon thut's sint him! He's Misther Brandon's pet bull an' he'll clane this camp av men loike he's done many a time before! He's wearin' river boots an' swillin' whisky!"

"Where?" Webster got to his feet, then.

"In the men's camp!"—gesticulating with his thumb. "He's just now come in, an' they're commencin' to sift out, the domned cowards."

Sure enough, a glance through the window showed a half-dozen men emerging hastily from the door of the shanty, glancing behind as they made off toward barn and blacksmith shop. One was stuffing belongings into a grain-sack.

Without stopping even for his cap, Ben stepped out and crossed to the men's camp, from which issued the sound of a great voice lifted in unmelodious song.

Ben did not burst into the place, but opened the door casually and slipped inside.

In the center of the room, close by the heating stove, above which socks hung from drying racks, stood Bull Duval. His cap was tilted on his head; he leaned backward from his hips; in his uplifted right hand was a quart bottle nearly full, and his voice bellowed the words of a woods classic:

"H i, Misther Webster! Rouse up—I got big news fer ye!"

> . . . . . tall and fat; her hair is red,
> Her face is plump and pretty.
> She's my daisy, Sunday-best-day girl,
> And her front name stands for Kitty.
> Oh, bung yer eye, bung yer eye.

In the far end of the room a half-dozen men were huddled. From several upper bunks concerned faces watched the Bull. Beside the sink where he had started to shave, the chore-boy stood wiping lather from his beard as though he had changed his mind about scraping cheeks and chin. These men were clearly afraid, certain that this hilarity was only a prelude to a mêlée in which heads would be broken and bodies bruised.

Duval was starting another verse, when

the swaying of his body as he moved to the measure of the ballad brought him facing the doorway.

Ben Webster had stepped forward two or three paces and stood watching him. His gaze was level, steady, and in his eyes danced a warning flame. The Bull broke short his song.

"Good day, Mr. Webster!" he said heavily, in mock respect. "I heerd you was the new walkin' boss at Hoot Owl, and likely you're lookin' fer good men. Here's one, Webster. Here's the best man you'll get a chance to hire until the next blue snow!"

Ben, heedless of the increased tension which showed on the faces of the onlookers, crossed the floor deliberately.

"You want to work for me, Duval?" he asked.

"Think I come over to spark you?" the other sneered insolently. "Have a drink."

He extended the bottle, holding it in his great hairy hand.

"In the first place, I don't want to hire you," Webster said. "In the second, there's no hooch allowed in this camp."

Like a flash he snatched the bottle, swung it and sent it crashing against the stove. For a brief moment the hiss of its contents against scorching metal sounded, while the Bull's head thrust slowly forward and his small eyes grew red with rage. His lip drew back, exposing yellow teeth.

"Will you walk out, Duval?" Ben asked. "Or do you want me to throw you through the door?"

A sound that might have been a laugh but which was more a rumble of mingled rage, contempt and surprise came from Bull Duval's throat. This man, lighter by twenty pounds, talking so to him, the best man in the country!

"*Throw* me out?" he cried thickly. "Throw *me* out? Why, kid, the best day you ever seen you couldn't—"

He got just that far in his boast. His hands had knotted into great fists; his body swayed forward. But before he could strike that first blow or fall into that initial clinch or carry out whatever plan of attack had formed in his truculent mind, a fist bashed into his lips, driving the words back into his teeth. His head rocked; his arms flew wide; knees sagged, and before he could recover, another blow caught him on the point of the chin.

It was a hard blow, with everything Ben Webster had from knuckles to ankle put behind its drive. It threw Ben off his balance, he struck so savagely, but hard as he had hit, quick as he had been, the force was not enough to put Duval down.

With a roar he closed, one great arm about Webster's waist, the other hand smearing across Webster's face to shove his head backward as the fingers sought the eyes. Ben strained and twisted away from that menacing hand, struggled against that crushing embrace, striking hastily with both hands, but the Bull's chin was against his own shoulder, his forehead burrowing into Webster's chest, and not until Ben lifted his knee with a drive like that of a piston, did Duval let go.

He reeled backward then, cursing inarticulately, panting and heaving forward again from his spiked stance on the rough floor as he struck with all his might. He was struck himself, but his blow went home, a stinging crushing impact on Ben's cheek-bone, and Duval's great weight followed, bearing the other to the floor flat on his back. The Bull spread arms and legs in a smothering sprawl as he went down, but before he could pin Ben close and helpless, the latter wriggled, threshing over, eluding a hand which clawed for his throat, grasping Duval's leg, lifting, straining, throwing him off, lurching to his knees and then to his feet, pitching forward off balance as he ran and coming to a halt against the bunks.

HE faced about sharply to see Duval standing in a stoop, blood on his mouth, arms hooked and extended, like some great jungle creature stirred to killing fury.

The Bull started to teeter forward, cautiously, catlike, wonderfully supple for so large a man, as though he would thwart escape, advance warily upon his prey and crush it to earth. But Webster did not try to elude him. With a hoarse shout he charged, head down, one arm before his face, the other drawn back; and when he struck, the sound was like that of a club smacking a quarter of beef. The blow spun Duval half about, and the next rocked him to one side, but still he was stanch on his feet, upper body racked, but mental faculties undimmed by those cracking, crushing blows.

The Bull gave up trying to close. He struck out, now, with renewed savagery. He caught Ben in the pit of the stomach and sent a terrific wallop to one ear. He dodged a brace of drives that it seemed would have felled a horse, so great was the grunting effort behind them, and then, feinting, sent in a slashing uppercut.

The great fist landed squarely on the point of Ben's jaw, lifted him from his feet and sent him reeling, over on his back again.

He was dazed by that blow. Bells clanged thunderously in his ears, and red lights flashed and flickered before his eyes, but as he crashed down to the floor, Bird-eye's voice, shrill and frantic, cut through the fog that had folded over him:

"The boots! Th' boots!"

Boots, yes. Bull Duval did not fling himself on his prostrate adversary this time. He charged forward erect two paces—three; and on the fourth, he bent backward from the hips, lifted his right foot and raked it out before him, raked those many spikes in the sole straight across—

No, not across the face of the prostrate man! His river boot swung across the place where a face had been. One lone spike ripped the skin over the cheekbone; a companion left a bright red mark. But Ben had jerked his head sideways, moved it that quarter-inch which left his face still a face.

Duval teetered on his left foot, hopping for balance and cursing because he had missed as Ben, reeling to his feet, shouted:

"Keep out! My fight!" He had seen Bird-eye Blaine leap for the wood-box and grasp the heavy iron poker. "My fight!" he repeated, and his hoarse voice was commanding.

BIRD-EYE fell back, clinging to the poker, lips moving. Webster's fight, indeed! He had seen many men fight before, had Bird-eye Blaine; born to a rough life, he had lived it fully. He had seen countless fights, but never had he witnessed such a fury as Ben Webster loosed then.

He drove out with both fists, heedless of defense. His eyes blazed with a cold fire that was fit to chill even the hearts of the wide-eyed Finnish watchers, even to cause the dark-skinned and placid Indians to betray tensity. He shouted as he struck. He used a knee to break another hold; he bit when Duval tried to throttle him with the grip of both hands. He danced as the Bull sought to trample his feet with his river calks, and all the time he was striking. He struck, struck, struck! Again and again his hard knuckles found their mark; fast and faster his fists flailed, now straight from the shoulder, now swinging in vicious hooks and rocking the great head before him, now bashing from beneath and fairly lifting Duval's spikes out of the floor. . . . .

A bench went over as they waltzed into it. Their combined weight, crashing against the bunks as Duval tried desperately to clinch, smashed an upright and sent men in the upper deck scurrying. Dust rose thickly. The sink was ripped from its place as Ben drove the Bull into it and clear of him with a body blow, and a chair was wrecked as Duval, caught by another punch, went over it backward.

He held his arms before his face, the soles of his spiked boots upward, expecting that his adversary would plunge upon him. But Ben did nothing of the sort. He stood still, spread-legged, breathing hard.

"Get up!" he panted. "Get up! I've only started!"

Duval rolled over, his back to Webster, and shoved himself to his feet. Not until he had risen and faced about did the other move. Then he closed with another of those flying rushes, with one drive pinned Duval against the wall, with another sent his head crashing against the window frame.

The Bull gave a bubbling roar and tried to grapple. His hands were struck down. He swung mightily, slowly and missed; and as he went by, off balance, a chopping stroke on the back of the head floored him.

Again Webster waited.

"Get up!" he cried thickly. "Get up, Duval, and take the rest!"

THE other started to move, looking over his shoulder with the one eye that remained open. He saw a tall, supple young man, hair awry, shirt ripped open from neck to belt, cheek bleeding, jaws set, stand there swinging one fist as

though the knuckles were wild to strike again. He sank back to the floor, shuddering.

On that Webster relaxed and moved close.

"Enough?" he asked, sharply, prodding the Bull with a toe of his pac.

Duval moaned and shook his head. He made as if to rise again, and Ben stepped back, giving him every chance. A mutter arose behind him.

"Finish him as he lays!" a man cried.

But the boss at Hoot Owl would not do that.

The Bull did not get to his feet. He started to, drew one knee beneath him, heaved and then sank back to a hip. He swore heavily and hung his head, propping his torso by both great hands spread wide on the floor. He was for all the world like an ugly, wounded, helpless bear, with his head swaying as he moaned oaths.

"Through, Duval?" Ben asked, and it seemed as though his bruised and battered face tried to twist in a grin. Surely, his voice was casual! The other gave no intimation of having heard. "There's more. Or have you got enough?"

And then, when no reply came, Webster stooped, grasped the Bull's shirt in his hands and half lifted him.

"Let go!" the man blurted. "Let go or I'll—"

He tried to twist away, tried to strike Ben's legs, but his strength was gone, beaten from his great body. He was dragged across the floor, river boots trailing over the boards, straight to the doorway. With one foot Webster kicked open the portal, and with a heave he flung Duval, the Tincup terror, into the trampled snow outside.

Men stood there. They had been peering through the low windows. One of them, an old man, the road-monkey, still had the grain-sack in his hands, bulky with contents.

"That your turkey?" Ben asked.

The man nodded.

"Where are you going with it?" he asked, feeling his torn cheek gingerly.

The other sniffed.

"I been in camps afore when he come to clean 'em!"—looking at the prostrate, hard-breathing Duval. "I figured it was time for me to move when he come in. I'm an old man, Mr. Webster. I can't stand no abuse no more."

"Come back. You're working for me. I'll try to take care of any hell-raisers that show up to make Hoot Owl uncomfortable for my men."

The old fellow looked at his employer, and his eyes wrinkled in a queer smile.

"All right, Mr. Webster," he said in his cracked voice. "You done a fair job this time. I guess I'd like to work for you a while longer."

He stepped through the doorway. The others who had been outside followed him back into the shanty.

A HALF-HOUR later Bull Duval, who had washed his bleeding head and face in the horse-trough against the shouted protests of Bird-eye Blaine that it would be unfit thereafter for his teams to drink from, shoved himself erect and wiped trembling hands on his Mackinaw.

The door of the van opened, and Webster emerged. His face was swollen and discolored, but his torn shirt had been replaced by another. He walked straight to the bully and examined his face critically.

"Fair job," he said, as though to himself and grinned. "A fair job, Duval. But remember this: if you ever set one of your feet in this camp again, or on any operation where I'm in charge, I'll give you a licking you'll remember!"

The Bull whimpered.

"I know when I got enough," he said, and his one serviceable yet blood-shot eye searched Webster's countenance. "I—I didn't mean no harm," he whined. "I was drunk."

"No, you weren't drunk. If you'd been drunk, I wouldn't have hit you. You knew what you were doing. Now, Duval, why'd you come out here this morning?"

He was no longer grinning as he asked that question. His voice snapped.

The other sniffed. "Well, after you beat me out of the prize th' other day they razzed me pretty heavy in town. I got a little hooch in me and thought—"

"Never mind that sort of stuff! Nobody in Tincup razzes *you*. Who sent you out here?"

Duval looked away.

"Nobody," he said weakly. "I got drunk. But—but if you're needin' help, I can work for a better man than I am."

Ben put his thumbs into his belt and shook his head.

"No use, chum. You're going to tell

me why you came and who sent you. Was it Brandon?"

"No!"—evasively.

"Sure? How much did he give you to come here? Or are you on the pay-roll to do such chores?"

"Hell, he didn't—"

"You're a worse liar than you are a fighter, by a mile or two, Duval. Mine was a good guess, wasn't it? What were his orders?"

"Well, he said if I didn't, that he'd—"

"Good! That's all I want to know. Jake! There's the road. And you can take this little message to Brandon: Tell him that he needs to send more and better men the next time. And as for you: I hire no men who can be hired to fight other men's battles. Make tracks, now!"

CHAPTER VII

IT was Sunday evening.

Old Don Stuart, propped on pillows in the narrow, cell-like room of Joe Piette's hotel, breathing quickly, his face suet-colored under the light of the kerosene lamp, listened to the colorful account that Bird-eye Blaine, with many gestures and considerable profanity, rendered for him of what had transpired at Hoot Owl since Ben Webster had taken charge of the operation.

"An' so he's got the mill-crew a-wurrkin' their blessid heads off fer him an' he's got thut ragged-pants gang av beet-weeders an' hay-pitchers thut passes fer a loggin' crew doin' more'n they've ever done in their lazy loives before!"

He nodded with great emphasis and brought a fist down on one bony knee.

"Good," gasped Stuart feebly, and tried to smile. "Good boy. But—he's young and—alone against Brandon. It'll be—that tough nut he—was lookin' for."

"Harrd?" Bird-eye glared at him. "Harrd! The harrder they comes, the better pleased he is! Sure an' he's a glutton fer work, Donny! An' the saints, they have a finger into ut too, him a-comin' just whin they'd got pore owld Abel licked. It'll be a tough foight or I'm a bad guesser, but damn me eyes, whut a foighter the lad *is*!"

It seemed that Don's breathing was even quicker. A restless light appeared in his eyes, and his thin old hands fidgeted nervously with the blankets.

"A tough fight—hard nut. Oh, he don't know—Bird-eye, what he's up against." He struggled to sit erect, and his eyes shone brightly with an odd sort of desperation. "If Brandon can't—drive him out by—trickery, he'll—kill him." He gasped and swallowed, evidently making great effort to talk rapidly. "I'm a coward, Bird-eye—been a damn' coward —for years. I've been—afraid to tell—if I lived. Now—I'm afraid to die with it —on my soul!"

HE panted, and Blaine removed the pipe which he had puffed so placidly while contemplating the stirring events he foresaw because of Ben Webster's advent. Now he looked in alarm at his friend.

"Lay back, Donny! Dawn't git yerself ixsoited. . . . . Coward? Naw, ye're no coward!"

He took the sick man by the shoulders and tried gently to force him back on the pillows; but the old fellow resisted.

"Can't die—can't—with it on—my soul!" he gasped, and lifted a face stamped with stark appeal to the little man.

Bird-eye stood back, solemn and worried.

"Somethin' troublin' ye, Donny?" he asked soothingly.

The other made a feeble gesture with one hand.

"A man's got—to fight fire with—fire. Brandon'll get—unless he—unless—" He put a hand to his throat and moved his uplifted chin as though strangling. "Want to write—a letter, Bird-eye. Get—paper. Fight—fire with fire!"

This was no whim of a sick man. His want was not clear but the purpose was a burning conviction, an utter necessity, and his companion hastened to ease his mind.

"Lay back, Donny. Be still, now! I'll get ye things, but kape quiet, man, kape quiet!"

He hastened down the stairs, secured writing-materials, and, from the table in the little office picked up a mail-order catalogue. With these he ascended to the sick-room hurriedly.

"Here ye are! Book to wroite on, paper, envelope, pencil. . . . . I'll sit by ye, Donny."

STUART was calmer, now, in the manner of one who has brought all the force of his will to bear against the weak-

nesses of the body. He let Bird-eye prop him comfortably with pillows, placed the thick catalogue on his knees and arranged the sheets of paper. He did not start to write at once, however. He sat staring straight before him and then lifted his gaze to the little man who stood at his bedside, cramming tobacco into the bowl of his briar with a gnarled finger.

"I'd like to be—alone, Bird-eye," he said in a hoarse whisper. "I've been alone —with it so long—think better alone."

The other shrugged.

"Av course, Donny," he acquiesced. "Av course. Oi'll come back when ye're finished."

He went down the stairs, his rubbers thumping on the treads but he stood at the bottom a long interval, shaking his head in misgiving and muttering to himself. Then he turned about and crept back as softly as a cat. On the landing he seated himself, leaning against the thin partition of matched boards which separated him from the sick man. Faint sounds from its other side: the rustling of paper, the stirring of a body on the bed, once a low moan. The man in the darkness strained to listen, not in the spirit of an eavesdropper but rather as one who stands by a friend in need, but for a long time there came no other sound.

For a half-hour, perhaps, Bird-eye sat there, growing cramped and chilly in the draughty hallway. Then he leaped to his feet with a little cry. From within had come a long, retching gasp, a sharp creak of bed-springs, a thud on the floor. Blaine burst into the room. The catalogue was beside the bed. Old Don lay half doubled forward, face in the blankets, one limp hand swaying over the edge.

"Donny! Donny, b'y, what's up?"

He raised the silent figure, laid it back, stared at the face which now seemed so peaceful, and then ran excitedly down the stairway to find Joe Piette.

IN the room was confusion after Dr. Sweet answered the hasty summons. Piette, voluble, excited, clacked in his *patois;* two mill-hands who had been in the office below added their presence and comment and excitement.

The Doctor felt vainly for a pulse, touched the shrunken breast of the old cruiser, and then turned away with a significant shake of his head.

The usual things were said, and then Bird-eye and the physician were alone in the room. The little Irishman's eyes brimmed with tears, but behind these was an intent look as of one who impatiently awaits opportunity to pursue a specific purpose, and when the others trooped down the stairway he closed the door and returned hastily to the bedside.

"Sure an' where is ut?" he asked beneath his breath, riffling the leaves of the bulky catalogue, shaking folds out of the rumpled blankets.

"What are you after, Bird-eye?" the Doctor asked.

"Ah! Here ut be!"

ON his hands and knees, peering beneath the bed, he uttered that ejaculation, and reaching far under rose to his knees with a sealed envelope in his hands.

Across the front was a scrawl, written with an indelible pencil. Blaine scowled, got to his feet and held the envelope closer to the light. Dr. Sweet bent over it beside him.

"*'Ben Webster,'*" the latter read aloud. "*'Open this when the nut gets too hard to crack!*"

The Doctor scratched his mustache. He turned his face to meet Bird-eye's startled gaze.

"It's somethin', Doctor, thut he didn't dare die with on his soul! Somethin' he was fearful to tell if he lived, as well. Somethin'—" His hand holding the letter trembled sharply. "Doctor, sure an' it's somethin' about th' owld devil himself!"

"Brandon?"

"None other!"

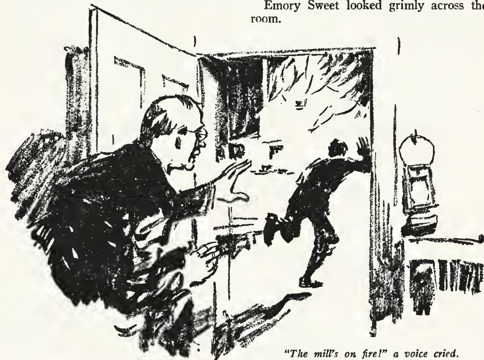
Emory Sweet straightened and gave a long-drawn "Hum-m-m!"

"Brandon fer sure!" Bird-eye whispered hoarsely. " 'Twas Brandon kept Donny out av Tincup fer years, wasn't it? 'Twas Brandon tuk him when he was hittin' the booze years back an' made a slave av him, he did! It's Brandon who's been comin' here ivery night, not loike you'd come or I'd come, but like a masther'd come to watch a slave—a slave he was a-scared to have around.

"Why was a rich man loike Misther Brandon afraid av a' owld bum like Donny?" he demanded, shaking the letter close in the other's face. "Who was 't with Faxson when he died? Who was 't put Faxson's murder on McManus?" He gesticulated gravely toward the bed. "Him—him, Nick Brandon's slave, who wance was a

man, who wint to hell with booze, who's truckled to Brandon ever since until his pore owld heart broke!"

"By George, Bird-eye, it does look as though it might—" The Doctor did not finish what he had started to say. Instead he remarked intently: "I'd give a good deal to know just what's in that letter!"



"The mill's on fire!" a voice cried. Abel lurched to the door to see Ben flying toward the mill yard.

"Oi'll be takin' it myself to Ben Webster this night. Aw, an' wont Misther Brandon squirm whin the b'y starts in crackin' the tough nut! An' it's the justice av the saints, no less, that Brandon brings Webster to Abel's attintion in a foight over owld Donny.

"Ah, the man's well named, owld Nick, so he is! Many 's the toime I've been sore timpted to snuck up behint him with a shillelah an' sock him stout where it'd do the most good—*him,* wantin' to deny a dyin' man a little thing like dyin' where he wance had friends!"

They went down the stairway together after closing the door softly behind them, Bird-eye still muttering imprecations on the head of Nicholas Brandon.

EVEN as Doctor Sweet emerged from the dark mouth of the narrow stairway, the front door opened and Brandon himself entered the hotel, stamping new snow from his feet. The others were there, Piette, a drummer, the mill-hands, two or three more. But Brandon's attention centered only on the physician.

"Well, Doctor?" he began, and it seemed as though his lungs were too well filled with air to speak comfortably. "How's our patient this evening?"

Emory Sweet looked grimly across the room.

"Old Don has taken the long trail," he said.

"Dead? Dead!" Brandon's voice on the query pinched up a bit. And on the repetition of the word it fell hollowly, with a finality which might have indicated sorrow, dismay or amazement.

But none of these three was on his face. The line of his mouth did not change. His brows gathered ever so slightly as a man might on hearing news that shocked him. But in those dark eyes was just one expression: relief. Relief! Relief from suspense, from worry, from dark *fear!*

"You don't say! So the old fellow's gone!" His voice was even now, colorless, assured, as was normal. "Well, it was to be expected, I suppose. Were you with him, Doctor?"

"No; he died alone."

Brandon drew a breath as one will who has asked an important question and received a pleasing or reassuring answer.

"Talking couldn't have helped a man in his condition. He—he didn't visit with anyone, did he?"

A queer hesitancy crept into his manner on this as though he shrank from knowing the reply, and Dr. Sweet turned to Bird-eye Blaine inquiringly. But Bird-eye did not look at the Doctor. He was staring at Brandon, and as that individual's gaze, following the Doctor's, encountered his, the Irishman's lips twitched into a bitter smile.

"So ye're after wonderin' whut pore owld Donny said on his deathbed, are ye?" he demanded, and with this challenge stepped down from the stairway and crossed the floor slowly toward Brandon. "So ye're worryin', now, over whut he moight have said, eh?" He laughed, a dry and mirthless laugh and came to a halt a pace from the man who was so powerful in Tincup.

Brandon's face had not changed in line or color. Only by a scrutiny of his eyes could one have told that a storm seethed within him, for flashes of light flickered across their dark depths, like the reflection of heat lightning in a woods pool.

"Worrying?" he countered steadily. "You're either drunk or crazy, Blaine!"

"Mebbe!"—with a sharp nod. "Mebbe both. But old Donny wa'n't. . . . He didn't do talkin', Misther Brandon. Rid yer moind av thut worry. Sure, an' he didn't talk to a soul av what was on his moind whin he knowed he lay dyin'. . . . . No talk! No talk fer somebody to repate an' git twisted up an' lave out things thut should've been told. . . . . He *wrote* ut! Thut's whut he done, Brandon!"—voice mounting. "He *wrote* ut! An' he wrote ut fer one who'll make ut so hot that the tough nut'll pop open!"

With a sweeping gesture he thrust the envelope close to Brandon's face, so close that the man jerked his head backward sharply.

"He wrote ut!" Bird-eye cried savagely. "An' may the saints speed the day whin Misther Webster puts to use the thing owld Donny had to tell!"

Grimly he poised an instant before the larger man. Then he thrust the letter into his shirt pocket, buttoned his jacket tightly across it, slapped his chest decisively, and without another word strode determinedly to the door and let himself out into the street.

IT was late when Bird-eye stepped into the darkness of the tiny office where Ben Webster slept at Hoot Owl, struck a match and lifted it high above his head.

"Hi! Misther Webster!" Ben roused himself at this and squinted at the flickering match. "Git up! Rouse up! I got big news fer ye!"

They lighted a lantern, and by its glow Ben read the inscription on the letter which Don Stuart had left him as Bird-eye hastily and excitedly explained.

"There's somethin' in ut he'd carried secrut fer long!" he whispered hoarsely. "Ut's to do with Brandon, with fightin' fire with fire, or I'm the worst guesser in the woods! An' if ye'd saw his face whin I told him owld Don 'd wrote ut, ye'd have knowed the man's set wild with fear!"

"Poor old beggar!" Ben said gently.

"*Poor!* Him?"

"Stuart, I meant. Tough to die that way. And I never got in to see him again!"

Bird-eye nodded. "Yes. But mebbe he's done ye as great a favor as anny man ever done! The' 's somethin' in ut about Sam Faxson an' McManus, I'd bet me last shirt!"

Ben shrugged and turned the envelope over. Then he rose, yawned and slipped it into the drawer of the plain table that did service for a desk.

"Aint ye goin' to read ut, even?" Bird-eye demanded in extreme amazement.

"Why, no. You saw the directions: to open it when the nut gets too hard to crack."

Blaine opened his mouth. Words would not come. He moved one hand before him in a gesture of complete bewilderment.

"Well, I'm domned!" he breathed finally. "Here mebbe ye've got the club thut 'll droive him out av the country an' ye aint even curious about ut!"

Webster smiled. "Maybe it's only a sick man's dream, Bird-eye. Maybe it's an—an ace in the hole. I've never yet looked at my hole card until I'm beaten on the board. I'm not beaten yet, not by a long walk! This nut isn't too tough to crack yet!"

Bird-eye scratched his head.

"No, not yet. 'Nd may the saints kape ye ever as far from a lickin' as ye are

now. But—I'd loike to bet my noble little tourin' car thut owld Donny wrote somethin' to do with the killin' av Sam Faxson. I would!"

"Well, you can't get any takers here, Bird-eye. Not tonight. Into the hay, now, and let me sleep! Tomorrow's another week, and we've got to log that mill somehow or maybe I'll need a peek at any hole card I may have."

ABOUT the time Ben Webster burrowed into his pillow and shed responsibility and perplexing problems to win refreshing rest, Nicholas Brandon turned in the pacing of his cold and otherwise deserted office and cocked his head alertly. The sound which had caused him to pause in that nervous pacing, however, was only the creak of a swinging sign outside and when assured of this he went on, up and down, across and back.

A single shaded light was on, throwing a cone of brightness down upon his wide desk. The window shades were drawn and no beam from this faint illumination of the room would betray his presence.

It was not unusual for Nicholas Brandon to be late in his office. But those drawn shades and this quick, restless, harried march to and fro, around and about, and that perspiration which beaded his forehead, and those sudden stoppings and listenings at the slightest sound. . . . . Ah, those were not usual for a man so thoroughly established in his community that he dictated every phase of its life and activity!

He stopped after a time and took a bottle of whisky from a desk drawer. He held it in his hands, debating. Then, with finality, muttered: "No—a clear head, now!" He shut the liquor in its place again and resumed his pacing.

A king, Bird-eye Blaine had called him derisively. A baron, Abel Armitage had told Ben Webster this man was. And the words were not ill-chosen, either. He ruled Tincup and the surrounding country with an iron absolutism. A strong man, a resourceful man, indeed. But tonight, alone in his office, remembering the words and looks and gestures of Bird-eye Blaine, a lowly employee of an insolvent venture, seeing again the flash of that letter waved before his eyes, he was no kingly figure. . . . . Unless it might have been the figure of a monarch who with reason fears the exposure of one vital weakness!

CHAPTER VIII

BEN WEBSTER had been on the job at Hoot Owl just one week. Abel Armitage was with him for the night. They had come down from camp at dusk, eaten supper in Buller's house at the siding and for long the mill foreman sat talking problems of operation with them before he was sent yawning to bed. Ben was tireless, it seemed. For a week he had labored daytimes and schemed until late at night, and now he spent another hour with Abel, trying, as he said, to make every dime look like a dollar.

"Now, say!" His face took on a curious smile as they folded their papers. "I haven't had much time to think about anything but patching up this outfit and getting it to function, but one thing's kept bobbing up so often that it's got my curiosity on its hind legs.

"Who was McManus? What about Sam Faxson? Where does the little girl you're guardian for come in?"

"*Little* girl!" Abel said, startled and then smiled. "Why, Dawn is—"

"I hear about McManus and Faxson and how Brandon is trying to beat you down so he can cheat the orphan child," the other interrupted, not detecting Abel's surprise. "How about it all?"

The old man's smile died out. He shoved up his spectacles and rubbed his eyes.

"We haven't had much time for history, have we? I'd intended to give you the story of this stand but we've been so concerned with bank balances and paper due and break-downs and labor shortage that I just haven't had time."

He stretched his feet before him and appeared to consider. Then:

"I'll have to make a long story short; just hit the high spots.

"First, Nicholas Brandon and Denny McManus came into this country when they weren't much more than boys. Twenty-five years ago men matured earlier than they do now, anyhow. They came in and were the first hardwood operators in this country. The pine had been skinned out, but the hardwood camps hadn't gotten this far from the centers of things. They'd had some experience and a little money but they hit at the right time, picked up a raft of timber for a song and started turning it into a fortune.

"McManus was married, and the daugh-

ter, Dawn, was born here. Brandon never married. Just when they were swinging nicely, everything running smooth as butter, McManus' wife died. He was as deeply in love as any man I've ever seen and it sent him completely to pot. He took to heavy drinking and got himself in a bad way.

"Of the two, Denny was the popular man. He was friendly, charitable, had a heart as big as a camp stove and as soft as a sponge. He'd go the route for anybody. Why—probably you've never even heard this—when old Don Stuart rimmed the company it was McManus who stood in the way of prosecution. Don had cruised and bought a lot of stuff for them. He always had been a drinker himself and on one spree got into some sort of mess and crooked the company out of three or four hundred dollars. Enough, anyhow, to let himself in for a long term in the penitentiary if they'd pushed it. Brandon wanted to prosecute, all right, but McManus stood up for Don. . . . . That was typical of the man: friendly, forgiving, a real human being.

"But Mac went to pieces himself. He would be off on a bender for weeks at a time and scarcely get over the shakes before he'd start on another. This, naturally, put a big load on Brandon, but he carried things along and never showed any ill feeling toward his partner although he did say—and he told Mac—that unless things changed ultimately he'd either have to buy or sell his share.

"Finally Mac got so bad that Brandon sent him out to a deer camp on Mad Cat with a fine old trapper named Sam Faxson. Great old character, Sam. Brandon figured—and it seemed reasonable—that Sam could keep Mac away from booze, you see. He was there a week or so, tapering off gradually, seeing nobody but Sam. Brandon was working away like a nailer, buying up a lot of stuff for himself, probably figuring that if McManus didn't straighten up he'd operate on his own hook. Both had bought more or less individually before that. McManus had this Hoot Owl stuff cinched in his own name before he went bad.

"Well, one night we were in the middle of a three-day blizzard and Sam Faxson stumbled into Don Stuart's shanty on the edge of town, shot through the arm and frozen so badly that he died the next afternoon. Don's story"—voice slowing and a finger raising for emphasis—"was that Faxson told him McManus had gotten out of booze and turned ugly and that when he—Sam—tried to prevent him from going to town for some more whisky he went wild at Sam and shot at him. Faxson was hit in the arm, had to have help and in trying to get it suffered more exposure than he could stand.

"Well, that caused a great stir! A party hit straight out for Mad Cat and couldn't find hide nor hair nor sign of Mac. A couple of old trailers agreed that somebody had gone down to the river below the camp the night that Faxson was shot. The Mad Cat is swift at that bend and never freezes. The trail seemed to go right to the edge of the stream and the accepted theory was that McManus, realizing what he'd done, had drowned himself. However, his body never was found so it seemed more likely that he'd come to himself and lit out. Brandon, who knew him best, always stuck by the suicide guess.

"An inquest was held; on Don's story a warrant was issued for McManus and so it stands, after all these years."

HE rubbed his face again.

"Now. That's that. The thing that's stuck in the minds of some of us is this: that McManus, under no circumstances, ever showed a quarrelsome streak, let alone giving evidence of being a killer. However,"—with a shrug—"he'd been on a long, long drunk."

He paused and shook his head. Then went on:

"Brandon carried on the partnership and his own interests, buying his own logs for the firm and sawing them in the mill. He bought right and left, left and right. As soon as another man would plan to operate Brandon would try to buy him out. If he couldn't buy at his own figure things commenced to happen to that man. . . . . Duval has figured in a good many failures!"—nodding profoundly.

"Finally it came down to this one piece, owned by McManus, which was the last which Brandon wanted and that he didn't have. He commenced to jockey so he could get title for it. Homer Campbell was judge of probate then. He and I were friends; about the last of the old crowd to keep a finger-hold in local politics because Brandon had been going in as strong for politics as he did for anything else.

Well, Nick went to Homer with a petition to have McManus declared legally dead so the estate could be probated and this timber disposed of. Mac had been gone seven years and such an arrangement could be brought about according to law.

"However, Homer got the notion that Brandon was a mite too anxious, heard that while Brandon was getting rich the partnership was in a bad way and decided that he wouldn't be a party to any scheme to rob an estate.

"That ended Homer politically. Nick put up another candidate and trimmed us properly and we knew that when the new judge came in he'd take orders from Brandon. So before his term expired Homer surprised Brandon by re-opening the McManus matter, declaring him legally dead and appointed me administrator for the estate and guardian for the little girl!"

His stomach shook with his chuckling at that.

"Nick was pretty mad, all right! I commenced to pry into things, found that the partnership books certainly did look bad and decided to take a licking there and sold out. We were stung, all right, but there was no use squealing. I took the money, paid up the mortgage on the Hoot Owl, sent Dawn off to school in the East where she wouldn't be known as the daughter of a murderer—a cloud which was mis-shaping her whole life—and tried to make some money for her.

"That's how it stands to date. I've failed. We're on the ragged edge; the estate right now, considering the location of this timber in Brandon's territory as a liability, is insolvent. Dawn's had to come back here to live where she's unhappy and what's ahead of us depends on Mr. Ben Webster, the nut-cracker!"

BEN gave a wry smile.

"This killing thing, now. Did anybody ever suspect Brandon?"

Abel shook his head.

"Faxson and McManus were alone. And McManus disappeared. I know what's in your mind, Ben. But there was no sign of a double tragedy there that night. Friends of Mac's worked for months trying to figure something else and couldn't."

He sat silent a moment and then asked dryly:

"Haven't read old Don's letter yet?"

"Not yet. The nut isn't too tough so far."

"A stitch in time, you know. . . . . And Brandon was afraid of Don, account of something in the past."

Ben grinned. "I'm superstitious. I don't like to use all I've got until I have to; don't even like to look at my hole card. Once, cruising in Ontario, I got off alone and was hungry as the devil. Had grub with me but also had a hunch that I'd be hungrier before I got more. Sprained my ankle badly towards night and had to sit with my foot in a river for three days before I could even crawl. That grub I'd held back from my hungry belly kept me from starving.

"In France I was in a shell-hole three days and nights. Had one drink of water in my canteen and couldn't even stick my head up, the air was so full of loose metal. Thought sure I'd get out the first night and had my mind made up to take that last drink at sundown, I was so near all in. Something stopped me. I didn't drink it until the second evening after that. It let me get back to our lines."

"Well, it's your affair—that letter," Abel said. "And the nut's going to get tougher fast. I hate to think what'd happen if we had to stop sawing for two or three days right now! This lay-out would be plastered with attachments!"

Webster nodded.

"And in less than two weeks it's payroll to meet and we never could hold even this poor excuse of a crew if we passed a pay-day. They're like men on a sinking ship as it is!"

"Yes, a shut-down certainly would—"

He stopped short. Into the stillness of the room came a strange, muffled shout. Ben started to his feet and Abel turned a bewildered face in the direction of the sound.

"Fire!" a wailing voice cried. "Fire! The mill's on fire!"

Buller could be heard bounding from his bed in the next room. Abel lurched to the door to see Ben Webster flying toward the mill yard, silhouetted against the dull glow of angry flame which showed through cracks in the structure which housed their hopes.

With mounting power this fine drama reaches a powerful climax in the next installment—in our forthcoming March issue.

"Gentlemen," I said, "let us not be rough. Much may be lost by violence."

A Man of Ambition

By BERTRAM ATKEY

There's a Spanish word which, literally translated, means "hangworthy." It would accurately describe the central figure in this story—but you'll find him none the less amusing.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

"DRAW your chair nearer to mine, dear heart, for I like to have you close by me,—close enough to touch your beautiful hand, and to see you plainly in the soft twilight,—make me another of these miraculous brandy, hock and raspberry syrup drinks, and let us enjoy the evening together," said Captain Lester Cormorant (late Bolivian Light Horse, and later, the 429th Mud Wallopers in Flanders).

Smiling fondly upon the six feet four inches of wiry masculinity which was reclining so gracefully in a cane chair on the veranda of the country house they were renting for the summer, the doting wife drew her chair nearer, as requested, and proceeded carefully to construct the attractive refreshment which her husband happened to be enthusiastic about at that moment.

He watched her reflectively through his cigar-smoke.

"What are you thinking of, Lester dear?" she asked, observing his close regard for her.

"Of you, darling," he replied promptly.

"What were you thinking of me, Lester?" she continued archly.

"I was admiring, love, the infinite goodness of a Providence which guided me safely across the desolate, hurricane-haunted seas of life into the placid and perfect harbor of your great heart and abounding love, and anchored me there, so to speak, safe and sound behind the breakwater of your very adequate income. Totally devoid of morals, good or bad, though the gods have made me, Heaven help me, there are moments when I cease to lament even that great affliction—so sweet in all other respects do you make them, sweetheart. This," he continued, taking the long tumbler, with its pretty pinkish contents, clinking with ice lumps, from her hands, "this is one of those moments."

He raised the glass.

"All my homage, dear heart!" he said, and drank deep, as a man drinks when seriously dry.

HE put the glass on a low table within easy reach, and waved his cigar to the chair at his side.

"Come, sit by me, my wife, and we will watch the evening shadows steal across the lawn," he said poetically.

"Yes, Lester," replied the happy wife.

For a little they sat in silence—a silence which was broken by the lady.

"So you feel, dear, that I make a nice, safe harbor for you?" she asked.

"Eh?" The Captain emerged from a reverie relating mainly to the chances of that aristocratically bred race-horse, Lady Quince, winning the Beeches. "Pardon, my heart—I was dreaming. A harbor, you say, Louise? Ah, yes. A haven of infinite tranquillity and plenty—I might even say profusion—from which I can, as it were, gaze over what I have called the breakwater of your three thousand a year—less income-tax—and see swimming far below me in the sea of life all those perils from which you have saved me—the shark called poverty, grimly eying me; the octopus called debt, from which I am now safe; the savage, inexorable swordfish called the law, with which I need no longer collide; in short, all the grisly denizens of life's deeps. Can you, then, wonder, pearl of mine, that the seed of love which the Fates planted on the night I stole your motor-car, not knowing you were in it, and subsequently proposed to you in the dark, has grown into an unbreakable vine which binds both our hearts together—eternally and inseparably? Have I your permission, dear one, to place my feet upon the veranda-rail? It is inelegant, but the new tennis shoes you bought me, perfect though they will be in a day or so, pinch a little, and by raising the feet one gains a certain ease. Thank you, life."

He cradled his feet upon the rail and continued:

"It would be an affectation to deny that it has been my good fortune to win the love of many women. I have had a full and varied life, on account of my grievous infirmity—I would not wish my worst enemy to be born without morals of any description—and the love of women has, I confess, figured in it. But compared with your love for me and mine for you, all other loves in my life have been no more than the merest passing, ephemeral, transient episodes. Yes, indeed. There has been a woman here and there, in past years, who has succeeded in constructing for me with her love a species of harbor, and even has breakwatered it with mighty income, yet at the first shock of the seas of adversity it has all crumbled and fallen away, leaving me, so to speak, high and dry upon the beach—in fact, I may say, upon the rocks."

He smiled, settling deeply in his chair.

"Unhappy, moral-less wretch that I am!" he added lightly.

Louise Cormorant seemed interested.

"Have richer women than I loved you in the past, Lester?" she asked.

"Richer in the sense that they possessed a greater number of those mere tokens called money, yes," he said; "but they were poorer in all else."

"Who was the richest woman that ever has loved you, darling?" inquired Louise curiously.

The Captain thought.

"I will tell you, dear heart," he said. "I will tell you the whole story."

IT was, perhaps, twelve years ago (began the Captain) that, driven by an adverse breeze, amounting to a positive cyclone, of unpopularity which had suddenly sprung up about me, I was compelled to evacuate, in some haste, the town of Buenos Aires.

The root cause, my dear, of my excessively abrupt quittance of that wealthy South American city was the total inability of the general public to understand that I was unlike all other men, and that those who had dealings with me must bring to the transaction a much greater degree of broad-mindedness than they usually found necessary to employ in dealing with their fellow men.

I refer, of course, Louise, to the tragic omission of morals from my psychology—at birth—and in spite of the great expense to which my good parents had gone for tutors, pastors and so forth, my disastrous inability to acquire a moral of any description.

It is at all times a disconcerting and very painful experience to have to whip out of a town at short notice for safety's sake—although it has often happened to me, I have never really become inured

to either the process or the sensation. On this occasion it was really annoying.

I had been conducting a profitable and rather well-thought-out business—a form of lottery, invented by myself, the great charm of which, I may explain, briefly, without puzzling your head with a mass of detail, was that only the proprietor of the lottery could win the prize and that the subscribers thereto had really as much chance of drawing the winning numbers as—as you have ever had of being forgotten by the income-tax sleuths.

I was, then, prospering until, by sheer bad luck, a clerk in a shipping-office discovered what I may term the joker in my system. He called upon me demanding an impossible figure for his silence, lost his temper, and precipitately made public what he chose to term the "fraud."

However, my natural quickness of wit stood me in good stead, and by the time a crowd of regular ticket-holders had subscribed the cost of a good hemp rope, charged their revolvers and reached my office, I am glad to say that I was a good many miles north of the town, and was still progressing at a hand-gallop.

I do not disguise from you, Louise, that that departure ushered in for me a protracted period of considerable stress and discomfort. In spite of a very fair knowledge of the species of Spanish used by the inhabitants, things went wrong. I wanted little, but that little was extremely hard to get. My mule—I had taken the precaution to secure the first mule I passed on my way out of Buenos Aires—deserted me. At least he disappeared one night, and it was hopeless to hunt for him in the great plains of Uruguay, in which country I was then wandering.

But, not to harry your gentle heart with a detailed account of my sufferings, dearest Louise, let it suffice to say that in due course I arrived at the borders of the vast estate belonging to a Spanish lady, the Countess Tortilla Maria de Frijole y Bragoso-Zaraganza, a widow lady who, I shortly gathered, was one of the richest women in Uruguay. She was usually spoken of as the Countess Maria.

BY means of a few of those polite fictions without which good society in all parts of the world would invariably collapse, I conveyed a general impression that I was an Englishman of rank, lost while returning from an exploring expedition which had tracked the Parana River to its source, failed to discover the giant stuntosaurus which was said to lurk in the Paraguayan forests, and other little matters of that kind.

Englishmen of alleged rank were not so common out there at that period as they are now, Louise of my life, and it goes without saying that the hospitality of the Countess was instantly extended to me.

Although I did not meet the lady until the next day, it was at once apparent that I had drifted into contact with one who was quite formidably wealthy. Her house was huge—and, for Uruguay, well-built—and I forget now precisely how many hundreds of thousands of acres of rich pasture she owned. But it was many. The place swarmed with servants and retainers, and there were a few guests.

At least, that is what some three or four gentlemen who took meals with me said they were, though they resembled cardsharps, and behaved—that evening—as such. Naturally their most strenuous endeavors to turn a dishonest dollar out of me over a friendly game brought them nothing but disappointment, loss, and at last a bitter acceptance of the fact that in Sir Gervase Jarman—for so, temporarily borrowing my good old father's name, I was calling myself—they were dealing with a man whose science with the pasteboards was considerably more modern than theirs. We spent an amusing and, for me, not unprofitable evening.

At breakfast the company had dwindled to four of us, namely, the two card-loving visitors, whom I gathered to be politicians—one from Montevideo, Uruguay, who called himself, possibly correctly, Don Vincente Morientes, the other from Asuncion, Paraguay, who referred to himself, perhaps truthfully, as Don José Salammbo. The remaining member of the party was an extremely handsome boy of about eighteen, who said his name was Sonora—Sonora the violinist, who lived in South America. "My home is South America," he would say, smiling through his cigarette-smoke, "and my wife is my violin." He played the violin very well. This youth, I learned afterward, had wandered all over South America, living at the houses of anyone who would have him, and moving on when they wouldn't have him any longer. He was now attached, in an indefinite way, to the household of the Countess, who liked to hear him play.

His wild, passionate music reminded her of things, she was wont to say. I liked the lad. He was bright, and as much at home there or anywhere else as a swallow on the wing. He gave me some useful information about the country. It was from him that I learned something of the vast possessions of the Countess. She owned, it seemed, so many myriads of cattle and sheep that, said Sonora, the food-value of beef and mutton were as meaningless to her as the beverage value of salt water is to a cod.

By the time the crowd had charged their revolvers, I was miles north of the town.

"There is a good deal of jasper and porphyry exported from this country, señor," said Sonora. "But do not mention it to the Countess—she owns practically all the quarries in the country, and it bores her. Of gold and silver mines she owns only two, but they are very rich. Also twenty per cent of the rent paid in Montevideo, as well as thirty per cent of the rent owed is hers, for she owns about half the town. Guano, she thinks nothing of—she owns a deposit on an island off the coast which, in spite of its gradual shrinkage owing to rain, alone would make her an immensely rich woman. Yes," said the lad, reaching for his violin, "this lady, your hostess, my kind patroness, is in no danger of starvation, I believe."

SHE appeared at lunch-time, and she did it well. It was like a queen who is anxious to keep up her position making her appearance, heart of mine. Extremely well dressed, in the Spanish style, she was a woman of perhaps forty. She still possessed the last remnants of what had once been almost beauty, but in spite of the extraordinary distinction which characterized her, frankly she had passed the stage at which she would have had a hundred to eight chance of winning a "golden apple." At least, for beauty, though she might have scrambled in to the first three past the post on the grounds of talent—for she was a very talented woman.

She was very, very tall, six feet three, I should say—little Sonora looked like a tomtit as he bowed to her.

Our eyes met, some feet above the head of Sonora, Louise.

She was six three, I six four—both of us lonely, both past the age of illusion, both, I believe I may say, the only ones of really distinguished appearance there. Our eyes met—clung. . . . . Hers fell.

I heard Don José grind his teeth on my left, as I bowed, and on my right a low gnashing sound from Don Vincente. I understood then, why these politicians were hanging about that great house, instead of getting on with their politics, and I swore an oath that come what might, I would save the lady and her income from these fortune-hunting hounds. If necessary I would marry her and personally administer her income for her, myself. I had long felt that I could do exceptional administrative work of that kind.

We went to the meal. The Countess

made me sit on her right hand and asked me, graciously, for particulars of my explorations of the Parana River. Moralless outcast as I am, Lord help me, I gave her particulars—very interesting they were, and, the Countess said, clever.

The political dons did their best to produce conversation which would mark them as men worth while—a difficult matter, and they failed. The lady was gracefully uninterested.

After lunch, Sonora played — a wild passionate thing, of his own composition, which he said was entitled "Love Tryst of the Black Jaguars."

Our eyes met. The violin sobbed.

"When I am President of Paraguay," said Don José, "with your permission, Countess, I will make Sonora leader of the orchestra at the Asuncion Opera House."

"Pardon me," interrupted Don Vincente, "I have already arranged—subject to the gracious approval of the Countess Maria—that Sonora comes to the Montevideo Opera House, when I take over the Presidency of Uruguay."

They gazed dagger-wise at each other.

"Sonora will therefore be in the fortunate position of having two moré strings to his bow," I said lightly.

"Rather let us say a string and a half," said Don Vincente. "Don José will agree that, rising little country though Paraguay is, many centuries must elapse before it can compare with Uruguay."

"On the contrary," replied Don José, with the smile of a he-wildcat in pain, "the natural resources of Paraguay are so vast that nothing can prevent its very amazing leap into the extreme forefront of civilized countries, when I am President."

"And how long do you gentlemen anticipate remaining presidents of the countries in question?" I inquired, knowing how exceedingly brief the term of the presidential office used to be in those South American republics.

"For just as long as it takes me to abolish the Republican party and establish a monarchy," said both, "and," they added, "for as long as our plans receive the support of the Countess Maria."

She smiled absently at them both. I saw then the reason why the future kings were hanging on at this place. It was, indeed, quite simple.

They were endeavoring to get sufficient financial support from the lady to enable them to carry out their plans. Each hoped to marry her. By achieving this they would obtain command of so vast a private revenue, that there was indeed a sporting chance of their being able to establish and maintain a monarchy. The *quid pro quo* to the Countess was, obviously, a half share of the throne either of Paraguay or Uruguay. Do you see, Louise, my love?

I thought rapidly. It would seem that I had been precipitated into a position pregnant with possibility for a man of talent, even though, alas! he were without morals.

I do not conceal from you, dear heart, that I was then a man of ambition. From my earliest youth I had felt peculiarly fitted to occupy either a throne, a presidential chair, or a position as husband to a millionairess. I was younger then—and you had not yet dawned on my life with love in one hand and an adequate income in the other.

Very little thought brought me to a decision. I must marry the Countess, and use the rival dons as my puppets. Later she and I could chat over the question of which country we preferred to rule as king and queen. I had no doubt she would prefer to be Queen of Uruguay. Personally I had a fancy for Paraguay.

"His Majesty King Lester the First of Paraguay" sounded rather better, I thought, than "His Majesty King Lester the First of Uruguay." "Para" sounds less rheumatic than "Uru," I think. An idle fancy, perhaps, and in any case I was not disposed to be stubborn on the point. Besides, it might be arranged—with a little tact—that we could unite the two. "Their Majesties King Lester and Queen Maria of Paraguay and Uruguay" made an extremely attractive remark, or so it seemed to me in those days. I am wiser now, thanks to you, moon of my darkness.

THAT, then, was the position. All that remained was to extract the utmost benefit possible from it. I am a man who rarely has found it difficult to get ideas—and I decided promptly to think things out.

The Countess desired to ride that afternoon, and, escorted by the four of us, she did so. Her mount was an imported Arab mare a magnificent creature—so, I observed, was mine.

The mounts of the dons were less magnificent. Sonora, being whimsical, was riding a milk-white jackass with a red saddle, which the Countess had given him one evening when he had pleased her with a com-

Some feet above the head of little Sonora our eyes met. . . . . Hers fell.

position which he called "The Firefly's Bride."

Need I say, Louise, that before we had ridden far across the illimitable pampas-like pastures the Countess and I had far outstripped our companions. We arrived at a clump of trees forming a glade, and there we rested the horses. We were at least a quarter of an hour ahead of the others, the Countess said.

I looked at her, smiling.

Her eyes fell.

I took her in my arms.

Her head fell—on my shoulder.

There were few words. She was six three, I was six four. It was a match—I thought at the time. That was before I had met you, I say again, dear heart.

Presently the dons came up, galloping, glaring at each other and at me. Far behind, little Sonora ambled, playing his violin—a new composition called "Lament of the Pampas Satyr"—I don't know why.

I think the dons realized at once that they now figured among the also-rans. They had been uneasy from the moment they saw the eyes of the Countess fall before mine. But they were intelligent enough to say nothing. Perhaps they still had hopes. But what hopes!

We rode homeward—a new respect, darkly tinged with hatred, had come into the manner of the future kings of Paraguay and Uruguay toward me. Maria and I took very little notice of them. Now and then we threw them a word.

I dined alone with Maria that evening. It was very pleasant—not to be compared with the incomparable little *tête-à-tête* dinners which you and I so frequently enjoy, heart, but not bad for Uruguay.

We had Sonora in with the coffee to play to us, but the dons had to do the best they could by themselves. They did tolerably well, judging from the number of empty bottles I saw in their vicinity, when, after a tender good-night, the Countess and I separated.

I THINK José and Vincente expected me. Sonora had wandered away somewhere or other in that huge house to find the major-domo's daughter, whom he was teaching to play the violin. He was generous with his genius at all times, that boy.

The dons received me with great warmth and remarkable courtesy, and very shortly I was in the thick of what remains in my mind, dearest Louise, as an experience which I regard as unique.

In the course of my career I have often been offered bribes, and, being what I am, Heaven help me, I have always accepted them. But I have never before or since been offered such spectacular bribes as those two rather dingy politicians pro-

ceeded to offer me—one bidding, as it were, against the other. It began in this way.

"I believe I do not commit the fault of precipitancy if I venture to offer the Señor Jarman my felicitations," said José.

"To which I am overjoyed to add mine," observed Vincente.

I thanked them both, and said that I believed that I was entitled to congratulation upon my forthcoming marriage with the richest woman in Uruguay, if not South America.

They glared like jaguars with smiles on their lips—very odd it looked, I assure you, Louise.

Simultaneously, eying each other, they placed upon the table before them two revolvers and a knife apiece.

"To prevent misunderstanding, señor," said José to Vincente, with a bow, indicating his battery.

"And to render confusion impossible," said Vincente to José, touching ***his*** guns. They were extraordinarily polite to each other, but a child could have seen that either would have loved to release the other from the cares and sorrows of this life.

"The Señor is probably aware that I am practically in a position to assure him that I hold the presidency of Paraguay in the hollow of my hand?" said José.

"And that I have the presidency of Uruguay, so to speak, under my thumb?" added Vincente.

"I have heard something of the kind," I agreed.

"The rebel army of Paraguay only awaits two things—the order to strike for me, and some pay," went on José.

Vincente said that the rebel army of Uruguay were similarly situated.

Then José informed me that he was visiting the Countess with two objects in view—one being to unite to himself in the bonds of holy matrimony the heart, hand, and means of the lady, and, failing that, to negotiate a sufficiently massive loan from her to pay the rebel army of Paraguay a trifle on account.

"If," said Vincente quickly, when José ran down, "if Don José had been describing my purposes here instead of his own he could not have put the matter more clearly, señor."

I REFLECTED. I do not conceal from you, Louise, the fact that, charming though the Countess seemed on such short acquaintance to be, and wealthy though she certainly was, I did not look forward with any great enthusiasm to spending the rest of my life in Uruguay, whereas, I had learned from Sonora, the Countess loved the place. She was practically a queen there, whereas in London, Paris, or New York, she would be merely a rich woman and those places were already so full of rich women, also women who were not rich but looked it, that she would be lost in the crowd. I reflected, therefore, wondering if the dons could raise enough money to buy me out.

"It is self-evident, gentlemen," I said at last, "that the idea of any matrimonial alliance between the Countess and either of you has ceased to possess any value as an idea. In short, *I* have completely scotched that idea. That is the fact, and, in these matters, one loses nothing by looking a fact full in the face."

They bowed, smiling like wounded pumas. "May we ask what are your views concerning the projected loan—to the new Uruguayan state?" inquired Vincente.

"We seek, dear señor, some indication of the advice you propose to offer the Countess Maria concerning the loan of the pending new Paraguayan ***régime,***" added José. I yawned.

"I will give the matter my consideration," I said, "in the course of the next few months. The Countess and I are naturally averse to allowing any question of £ s. d. to rear its sordid head in our present Garden of Eden."

Their jaws fell, and they turned white.

"A noble and delicate sentiment, and one for which—in ordinary circumstances—I have nothing but admiration," said José, Vincente nodding vigorously in agreement. "But alas, señor, an army must be paid! Do you think—you will allow me to mention money for a moment—that you could advise the Countess to lend me five hundred thousand dollars with which to carry out my revolution? I will pay her one million when I am president of Paraguay."

"For myself," murmured Vincente, "a loan of four hundred thousand would suffice —one million to be repaid on or about the day I take the chair as president of Uruguay."

"I do *not* think so," I said.

"There would be a—er—brokerage—a form of brokerage—upon the Paraguayan money amounting to one hundred thousand," said José, "payable to the negotiator of the loan."

"Good luck, señor," he said. "The detective is coming from the south. Here is a compass; all the points are illegible but one—which points north."

"The Uruguayan brokerage would amount to one hundred and fifty thousand dollars," murmured Vincente.

"I spoke hastily," snarled José. "The Paraguayan brokerage would be two hundred thousand dollars, naturally."

"Haste is a deplorable mistake which we are all prone to make," cooed Vincente, but his eyes were going bloodshot as he glared at José. "I too was hasty. The commission on the Uruguayan loan would be at least two-fifty thousand dollars."

"Bah!" snapped José. "Señor, arrange me a loan of five hundred thousand, and we'll halve it like brothers."

"For myself," murmured Vincente, "I am not a hard man. Arrange me a loan, señor, and I give you two-thirds *and* a charge upon the Uruguayan treasury for a further hundred thousand, payable in three months."

José said nothing—merely because he was speechless with rage.

"The amounts are large," I said in a general sort of way.

SO they came at me from a different angle. "True," said Vincente. "I see that, now that you mention it, señor. Therefore I will endeavor to make shift with a loan of a hundred thousand dollars, of which sixty per cent, as brokerage, will naturally come to you."

José had had enough. He was a man of shorter temper than Vincente.

"Señor," he said, "this is folly. It is like a circus—a going round and around. Let us be frank. Lend me, as one nobleman dealing with another, lend me twenty thousand dollars, and I will put you in the presidential chair of Paraguay—from which it is but a step to the throne."

Vincente smiled coldly.

"Paraguay? What is Paraguay?" he sneered. "A village in the north, somewhere, I believe. The Señor would not care to pay twenty thousand dollars for the presidency of Paraguay, when for half that sum I am prepared to guarantee to make him king of Uruguay within six weeks—he paying out-of-pocket expenses."

"What is that to offer the Señor?" screamed José. "King of Uruguay! That goes well! Hah! Emperor of Cowpastureland!" He wheeled to me.

"Señor, my last word. Lend me five hundred dollars, and I—José Salammbo—will positively guarantee to make you King of both Paraguay and Uruguay."

"I will do it for two-fifty!" snarled Vincente; and simultaneously they snatched their guns.

Do not start, Louise, my love. I may say that I was quicker than either. They never raised the pistols more than two-thirds of an inch from the table, for I had a revolver-muzzle trained upon the upper abdomen of each. One who has suffered the buffetings at the hands of Fate which I have, learns to be quick at the draw.

"Gentlemen," I said, "let us not be rough. Much may be lost by violence, nothing can be gained. It is evident to me that you are simple adventurers—very simple and not too adventurous."

BUT here Sonora entered with two men, at the sight of whom José and Vincente paled.

"Are these the gentlemen you seek?" asked Sonora.

The men—obviously police—smiled.

"Oh, yes!" And one approached José.

"You are arrested by order of his Excellency the President of Paraguay," he said pleasantly.

"Upon what charge?" hissed José.

"Conspiring against the welfare of the state."

He slid a pair of handcuffs on José.

And the second man, on behalf of the President of Uruguay, collected Vincente on much the same grounds.

"You may clear them away," said Sonora; and it was done.

"A very good riddance to some extremely poor rubbish," I said, smiling.

"You think so?" replied Sonora.

"They were mere fortune-hunters," I explained.

"Yes," said Sonora; and he passed me a small handbill. "Are you interested in handbills?"

"Not very," I replied, but glanced at it and perceived that my reply had been incorrect.

I was interested, for that handbill contained a most libelous picture, and a detailed description of myself—yes, my heart—with a list of the peccadilloes I was said to have committed in Buenos Aires, and a handsome reward was offered for my arrest—dead or alive. The barbarity of it!

"This," I said, "is a mistake."

Sonora smiled.

"I am sure of it. There is a detective on his way from Buenos Aires; he may be here at any moment. You will be able to explain it to him."

I put on my hat.

"It is important that I meet this detective person and explain at once," I said.

Sonora nodded.

"I knew that you would be anxious to do so, and I ordered a horse to be saddled and brought round."

Outside, a horse's hoofs were pounding as a peon led it to the house.

"That was considerate of you, Sonora," I said. "I will gallop to meet the detective." I swung myself into the saddle.

"Yes. He is coming from the south. You cannot miss him if you ride steadily south."

"Thank you," I said, and faced north.

"I like you, señor," said the youth; "but I like the Countess better. All's fair in love—h'm?"

"Oh, decidedly! I bear no malice."

He passed me something that glittered.

"Good luck, señor," he said. "Remember, the detective is coming from the south. Here is a compass. It is but an old, worn one; all the points are illegible but one—the one which indicates north."

"That is all I shall require," I said; and drove my heels into the horse's ribs.

A month later I left South America, dear heart. It palled upon me. And shortly after my arrival in England I learned that the Countess and Sonora had been married.

THE Captain sighed a little, remembered himself and converted the sigh into a cough. "A narrow escape, was it not? Had I remained to marry the Countess, I should not have met you."

He drained his glass.

"Let me make you another, Lester," said Louise.

"You are most considerate, my love."

"Did the Countess ever make you something to drink, Lester?"

"Never, my love, not once. One had to help oneself at that house."

"Did she ever give you any presents?"

"Not a present."

"And did you love her, Lester?"

The old adventurer rose slowly from his chair, like a jointed ladder, rising to his full height. He bent over the little woman who adored him, and slid an arm around her waist.

"Sweetheart," he lied nobly, "to tell you the truth, I couldn't stand the sight of the woman. Gently with the soda, darling; the brandy's the thing."

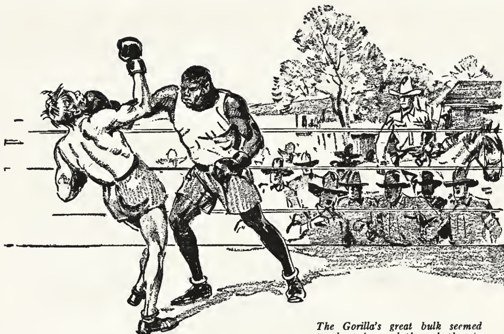
The sizzing of the siphon died out as the Captain, reaching over her shoulder, kissed her twice.

"Two for yourself, my pearl," he said, and added a little one on the cheek.

"And one for your income—which makes our happiness possible."

"Oh, Lester!" sighed Louise.

Another amusing story by Bertram Atkey will appear in an early issue.



The Gorilla's great bulk seemed to shoot forward through the air. "The right cross - counter!" grunted Buck.

The Right Cross-counter

By JAY LUCAS

Wherein a cowboy turns prizefighter and action follows fast —one of the best stories ever written by the author of "Vanishing Herds," "The Lion-hound's Story" and other good ones.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

"CAN you fight?"

Spike Maddigan tilted back his swivel chair, rolled his thick cigar over his left jowl, and glared at the tall, wiry cowboy before him as though he thought him a worm.

"Why," Buck Youngblood hesitated, "I boxed a good deal in France, till I got wounded."

"Huh! A little army boxin', an' you want me to hire you as sparrin'-partner for the Gorilla! Aint you fought none since you come back?"

"No."

"Well! Don't you know that whoever wins this bout gets a crack at the champeen? The Gorilla might hit you too hard an' kill you—even in eighteen-ounce gloves."

Buck had had about enough of the overbearing manner of the great mass of fat before him. He looked Spike Maddigan squarely in the eye.

"I don't die so easily as all that," he remarked.

"Oh, you *don't,* don't you!" jeered the other.

"No, by heck!" grunted Buck Youngblood angrily. "An' furthermore, I've been watchin' that big black fighter of yours workin' out, an' I'm not sure I couldn't stop him myself!"

Spike was on his feet now, and shaking his finger in Buck's face:

"Why, you poor sap! Say! I've a notion to hire you for a choppin'-block for the Gorilla. Say, bozo, I'll just do that! You're hired."

"WE wont need him now. I want to see you alone."

Jake Spreckels, Spike's partner, had come into the office a moment before with a telegram in his hand. His cold gray eyes looked at Buck now without seeing

him, and this Buck took to mean that he wasn't wanted any more. He thrust his big hat back on his head and strode angrily from the office.

"Dang it!" he murmured bitterly to himself. "Looks like they could speak civil to a feller. I'd like to choke that big chunk o' fat back there!"

He picked up the reins of his horse, and led it toward the open-air ring where the giant negro was just stepping forward to meet a sparring-partner. A great crowd of miners surged around the ring, with here and there a cowboy among them. Buck swung into his saddle, and from this vantage point watched the two fighters critically.

"Gorilla" Thompson had been well nicknamed. The great black torso, the short legs bent under him, the long arms dangling in front, all seemed more apelike than human. So did the small head, scarcely larger than the great corded neck from which it thrust forward aggressively.

"Ugh!" grunted Buck. "What an ugly-looking brute!"

The first round was scarcely half over before the white sparring-partner was on the run around the ring. Behind him came the great black nemesis, not with the quick movements usual to the boxer, not on tiptoe, but in slow, measured strides. The sparring-partner was a miner who had achieved some fame through southern Arizona as a boxer, and Buck knew enough of the boxing game to realize that his being thoroughly "shown up" in a work-out would add thousands to the gate-receipts for the coming fight.

"Why doesn't he keep that left out, an' his chin down!" grunted Buck to himself. "A kid couldn't help hittin' him on the button, how he's leavin' it open!"

THE white teeth of the great negro showed in a grin as he slowly, deliberately worked the miner into his own corner, and advanced upon him.

"Go to him, Billy!"

"Don't let him bluff you out!"

The crowd yelled wildly, encouragingly, to the miner. He, foolishly, glanced around, but the negro did not take advantage of the opening. Then, seeing the crowd of his fellow-workmen around him, he rallied. Through his confused brain flashed the old saying of the fighter: "The best *de*fense is *of*fense." With a grunt, half fear, half rage, he sprang forward, for the moment regaining something of boxing form. The negro gave ground, but only for the reason that a cat plays with a mouse.

"You got the big bum, Billy!" yelled the crowd encouragingly.

SUDDENLY the negro did a queer thing. He dropped his gloves, and thrust his chinless face forward to his opponent, whom he alone of the crowd—except Buck—knew to be already too much exhausted to strike with his full strength. A right sank into his solar plexus, a left against his temple. Then the surprised miner set himself and again crashed forward his right, this time to the other's jaw.

"Whuh!"

The Gorilla snorted and shook his head once, and slowly, grinningly, raised his hands again. Then something happened. A great black bulk seemed to leave the ground and shoot forward, head down, through the air. The white man struck once, with a strength given him by fear, but his glove never reached its mark.

"The right cross-counter!" grunted Buck.

It was indeed the famous cross-counter of Gorilla Thompson, and it cracked like a pistol-shot against the jaw of the other. Like a log, the miner dropped unconscious, but before he could reach the ground the negro's left caught him in the right side, knocking him through the ropes among his companions, two ribs broken, not to recover consciousness for half an hour.

"Damn!" snapped Buck disgustedly. "That's not a work-out—it's butchery!"

"Dirty is right, Buck!"

Buck looked down to see beside him the battle-scarred face of Mike Cullinan, now a quiet cow-man whose small range adjoined Buck's, but formerly, for a short time, middleweight champion.

"That darky should be lynched!" grunted Buck.

"No." Mike shook his head. "It was manager's orders, I'll bet; they want to give the Gorilla the name of being a man-killer, to help draw the crowd. You see, I know Spike Maddigan."

"How's that?" Buck glanced at the other curiously, detecting something queer in his voice.

"He managed me once—for one fight—when I was in the fight racket. He ducked with the gate receipts after the fight, an' left me without the price of a meal. He wasn't the great man then he is now,

dang his hide! I've never seen him since, but I'm goin' to have a talk with him before he leaves town—oh, yes, jest a little chat, that's all!"

"I want to see that chat," murmured Buck bitterly.

After a pause Mike asked carelessly: "How's things goin' on the ranch? I aint seen you in quite a while."

A CLOUD passed over Buck's face, and he stared broodingly at the ground for a moment before he replied:

"Goin'! The ranch itself is goin', Mike—I'm to be sold out next week, lock, stock an' barrel. Couldn't meet my notes."

"The heck!" gasped Mike, a look of grave concern passing over his kindly though much-battered face. "That's what enlistin' to serve yore country did for you! Yore fine neighbors stole you blind while you were in France, so's you never could get the outfit back on its feet."

"Can't be helped now," grunted Buck. "I'd do the same again, an' enlist. Worst of it is that the stores stopped my credit. Why—" He hesitated, but suddenly blurted forth: "Mike, I aint had nothin' to eat today!"

"You pore kid!"

Old Mike was open-mouthed with horror as his battered fist shot into his pocket. Kindly old bachelor that he was, he regarded Buck as a son. He it was who had first fitted boxing-gloves to Buck's small fists and helped him into the ring.

For years Mike had trained the lad, carefully pulling his own punches when sparring with him. Then came the day when he had carelessly left too wide an opening, and found himself flat on his back on the mat. Then there were the glorious days when he and Buck had fought as equals, but they did not last long—soon he saw that Buck was pulling *his* punches; but this he saw with no chagrin—was not Buck the heavier and the younger? And when Buck had sailed for France, he had reached the stage where the still-clever Mike could rarely penetrate his seemingly careless guard.

"Buck," grunted the old warrior, "I'd like to kick yore pants for you! Why in hell didn't you let yore old side-kick know you was broke? Here, son."

Buck took the small roll frankly as it was offered, and thrust it in his own pocket.

"Thanks, old-timer," he grunted. "I—I didn't want to say I'd failed."

"Now, climb on that horse o' yours an' come out home with me. I'm goin' to—"

"Say, you! Can't you hear?"

Buck turned quickly; he had heard the voice calling before, but had taken it for granted Spike Maddigan was not calling him.

"I mean you—that big cowboy over there. Come in the office here, will you?"

"Wait for me, Mike," said Buck. "Maybe he's decided to give me that job."

"What job?" called Mike after him.

"Sparrin'-partner for the Gorilla," Buck threw back over his shoulder.

A moment later he felt his elbow seized, and turned to face the old fighter.

"Say," Mike was grunting, "are you crazy! Yo're not ready for a contender yet—want to be a choppin'-block?"

"Why, don't you think I could—"

Before he could finish what he was saying, he found his other elbow seized, and an instant later he was in the office, the door slammed in his friend's face. Spike was waving him to a chair, a good-natured, friendly grin on his broad, oily face.

"Have a cigar, Buck."

"No, thanks; I don't smoke."

BUCK waved the box of expensive cigars aside and looked at Spike coldly, wondering what had caused the sudden change in his manner.

The chill gray eyes of Jake Spreckels seemed a good deal warmer than before as he pushed a bottle and glass across the desk toward Buck.

"Good stuff, this is—you needn't be afraid of it."

His tone was friendly, but Buck eyed him appraisingly as he answered tersely:

"Don't drink. Thanks."

"Keepin' trainin'? Good for you!"

"I always keep trainin'."

"Good for you!" Spike reached forward and clapped him on the shoulder. "If all fighters would do that, they wouldn't come draggin' into the gyms in fall so fat they can't walk. I'd like to get back in trainin' myself, but I aint got the time."

Buck did not answer; so Spike, after a glance to his partner, continued in tones of oily apology:

"Feller, I'm sure sorry I acted so grouchy-like when you was in here, but everything was goin' wrong all at once." He bowed his fat head and murmured

sadly: "Feller, did you ever have everything go wrong all at once?"

"I'll say I did!" blurted Buck bitterly. "My ranch is bein' sold on me next week —can't pay my notes."

"Oh-*h-h!*"

BUCK caught the tail end of the crafty glance that passed between the partners, and heartily regretted that he had spoken. They would know that, broke, he would be at their mercy regarding terms.

"Do I get the sparrin'-partner job?" he asked sharply.

"Better than that, feller! Say! I'll give you the chance of a lifetime!"

"How's that?" asked Buck suspiciously.

"Why, feller, I'll match you with the Gorilla for ten rounds. Want to fight him?"

"How's that?" Buck's tone was cold; he suspected that there was a darky in the woodpile as well as in the ring.

"Feller, I'll just tell you the plain truth." Spike Maddigan placed his fat hands on his fatter knees and leaned forward confidingly: "We just got a telegram from New York to say that Jack Mooney hurt his back an' can't fight no more."

"Then why not match the Gorilla with the champion? He's in line."

"Because the champ aint ready for a fight, for one thing. For another, there wouldn't be enough money in it for him to fight here—though there's too much in it for us to pass up."

"I'm not known as a fighter—I couldn't draw a house."

"Leave that to me! You'll take the match, then?"

"I—I reckon so," hesitated Buck.

"Of course," murmured Spike apologetically, "it's to be winner take all."

"The heck it is!" grunted Buck. "What do you take me for?"

"After all the bluff you ran about bein' able to stop him! Haw—*haw!*"

Jake Spreckels took the cue from his partner, and leaned back, roaring with derisive laughter.

"Hell!" grunted Buck angrily. "I'll fight him for money, marbles or chalk—or for nothin' at all! There!"

"Sign here, then."

AND before Buck realized what was happening, papers had been signed by all three, and properly witnessed by two miners who were called in. Then he found himself leaving the office with one of the papers neatly folded in his hand. He came to with a start to find Mike Cullinan beside him. Mike had to speak the second time before he received an answer.

"Say! Can't you hear? Did you get the sparrin'-partner job?"

"Huh? Ugh! No."

"Danged good thing! What's that paper in yore hand?"

"Huh? I signed up to fight the Gorilla ten rounds, winner take all."

"You—you—" Mike sank weakly on a boulder. "Why, you *danged* young fool!"

"Don't you think I can fight him?" asked Buck apprehensively.

Mike did not answer, but took the contract from Buck's hand and read it over twice.

Little though he knew of most legal matters, a fighter's contract was so familiar to him that he knew this one to be water-tight. He refolded the paper and handed it back to Buck. It is needless to say that one who had attained his eminence in the ring was quick-witted; in an instant he was on his feet, and his hand fell on Buck's shoulder.

"Son," he grunted, "maybe it's jest as well, after all. I wasn't anxious to see you turn professional—I held a championship, an' what did I make out of it? I came back home broke when I got too old for the fight racket, to start punchin' cattle for wages—where I'd been years before."

HE looked musingly ahead of him, and continued:

"Things shore have changed in the game! This fight will take in more money than I ever saw in a bout even when I held the title. Then, again, a fighter aint expected to run with the tough bunch like in the old days—why, if he's heard of takin' a drink, or seen with a girl that might be fast, his rep's ruined."

"But," Buck interrupted him, "what do you think my chances are?"

"Chances!" Mike waved his hand impatiently. "There aint none! It's a push-over for you *if you keep yore head*. He's a big mauler, an' slow: yo're a crack-up boxer, an' fast as a fly-weight. Still, you want to get down to business, an' train hard—you've only three weeks. Who—who's trainin' an' managin' you?"

Buck chuckled.

"Who do you suppose! A little Irish middle-weight—name o' Mike Cullinan."

"Oh!" Mike pretended surprise, although any other answer would have been the bitterest blow of his life. Suddenly he drew erect, snapping into a fiercely businesslike attitude. His keen glance shot over the spare figure of the other.

"Three weeks," he grunted. "Lots o' time—yo're in fine shape. Still, no use takin' chances. Climb on yore horse an ride straight home now. Go to bed at nine, an' get up at five an' run afoot over to my place—you'll train there; I've more equipment than you have. I'll see if I can't find a big miner or two for sparrin'-partners for you, an' I've to fix the heavy bag this evenin'. I'll have to build a ring, too, an' get some canvas to cover it. So long. See you tomorrow."

"Sign here!" And the papers were signed by all three, and witnessed by two miners.

SCARCELY had Buck turned the corner when Mike burst into the private office of Gorilla Thompson's managers, burst in without even having troubled to knock at the door.

"What the devil does this mean!" exclaimed Jake Spreckels angrily, setting down his glass with a bang.

"Ask him, there!" grunted Mike. "Remember me, Spike?"

Spike sipped a little from his glass insolently, without offering a drink to the man before him. Then he turned to his partner:

"That's Mike Cullinan—an old worn-out fighter. Used to be pretty good at one time."

Mike stood stock-still, staring at the fat man. Then Maddigan spoke again:

"Mike, did you want something? I'm busy today." He calmly took another sip from his glass.

"Of all the damned nerve!" grunted Mike, almost in awe. Then he continued:

"You're right I want something! I've been that kid's—Buck Youngblood's—friend since he learned to walk; an' furthermore, I'm his manager now, so I've a right to talk to you all I please."

"Shoot!" grunted Jake Spreckels with pretended good-nature.

"What I want to know," fumed Mike, "is where you got the damned nerve to sign that kid up to fight a contender—the only contender, now that Mooney's out of it? Why, he aint had even one professional fight—he aint got the chance of a snowball in hell of stayin' five rounds, to say nothin' of ten!"

"You never can tell," murmured Spike Maddigan sanctimoniously; "some queer things happen sometimes. He might knock the Gorilla out in no time." The corners of his fat lips twitched at the thought, and this he was at no pains to conceal.

"Might! *Might!*" roared Mike, shaking his finger under the other's nose. "You dirty crook, it'll ruin the kid! I had him comin' along nicely, an' here he'll get a lickin' that'll ruin him for life! Why—why, I stand a better chance o' lickin' the

Gorilla myself than he does, an' you damned well know it!"

"I know it." Spike was on his feet now, sneering contemptuously at the smaller man before him.

"I know it," he repeated; "but I can give the Gorilla a set-up here an' clean up thousands, seein' as the Mooney match fell through. Think I'd be fool enough to match him with any real fighter but the champ now, an' risk gettin' him whipped? Not on your life, Mike! A match with the champ will bring in close to a million, win or lose."

"He wont fight!" fumed Mike. "I'm his manager, an' I'm tellin' you the fight's off!"

"Oh, is it! Did he tell you I'd advanced him five hundred for trainin' expenses? I want him to make a great bluff at trainin'—it'll help draw the crowd. I'd advise him to train in secret—that'll keep people guessin', an' wont let 'em see what a dub he is. Now get out!"

"All right!" grunted Mike, as he stamped through the door furiously. "He'll fight him, but I'll get even with you for this, Spike Maddigan."

"Oh, sure! Close the door, will you?"

THE door closed with a bang that shook the building, and for a moment Mike stood outside listening to the derisive laughter that mingled with the clink of glasses within. Then the scowl fled, and his battered face twisted in a grin.

"Danged if they didn't fall for it!" he chuckled. "That'll end the Gorilla's trainin'—maybe the kid'll have some chance after all!"

He strode to his horse and prepared to mount. Suddenly he stopped dead still, holding the bridle in one hand, open-mouthed, staring the animal straight between the eyes.

"Jumpin' Jehosaphat!" he gasped. "If he could whip him, he'd get a crack at the champ for his second professional fight! He'd make—he'd make—"

He stood open-mouthed as sacks of gleaming gold seemed to pass before his eyes. Then a fly lit on the horse's ear, and the animal shook his head slowly, seemingly sadly. Mike took this for an omen, and slowly swung into his saddle.

"No," he grunted sadly, "he can't do it. Poor kid!"

As he touched the horse with his spur, he muttered to himself:

"Well, we'll get the best fight that's in him out of him anyway, for that bout. That means that I've to keep kiddin' him along, an' makin' him think he can win. Poor kid!"

He turned his horse in front of the great Endurance mine, and rode slowly into the town, thinking deeply.

Three days later Mike drove to town and joyfully hailed two husky and battle-scarred young men who had come from California fighting camps in response to Mike's urgent telegram. Big Nelson and Slugger Mowry had been known to Mike before as able men with their hands, and would make excellent sparring-partners for his protégé. Moreover, the Slugger had a grudge against Spike Maddigan which he was only too glad to repay by helping Buck Youngblood to train.

NEXT day Buck was climbing into the ring which had been erected beside the corrals, preparatory to a work-out with Big Nelson, when he heard the sound of approaching hoofs, and a girl rode up—a small, dark-haired girl, who held a folded newspaper in her hand.

"Buck," she demanded, "what does this mean?"

Buck took the paper, and there, glaring at him, not from the sporting page, but from the first page, were the headlines:

LOCAL BOY CHALLENGES
WINNER OF COMING BOUT
WINNER TAKE ALL

The managers of Gorilla Thompson suspected a practical joke yesterday when a young fellow in cowboy dress called at their office to challenge the winner of the coming bout. Furthermore, this challenger insisted that the bout be winner take all. That the affair was not humorous, after all, became apparent when it was divulged that the young cowboy was none other than Buck Youngblood, who fought more than fifty bouts while serving in France as a member of the A. E. F., winning thirty-six by knockouts, and the rest by wide margins. It is to be noted that the bouts not ended by knockouts were of six rounds or less, the records showing that no one has yet stood up to him for more than seven rounds without taking the count. There seems to be no doubt that he would have taken the championship of the A. E. F. but that he was invalided home severely wounded. He is now, however, in better shape than ever before, having entirely recovered from his wounds, and is therefore fully justified in claiming a match with the contender for the heavyweight championship. But here is something the fight fans should know:

GORILLA THOMPSON HAS REFUSED TO MEET HIM

The fans of the United States should insist that the Gorilla be matched with Buck Youngblood before he fights the champion.

The phenomenal fighting of Youngblood is not accidental, for he has been trained from earliest childhood by Mike Cullinan himself, the former middleweight champion of the world, one of the cleverest fighters who ever lived. It is said that Buck was only three years old when Mike first swore that he would make him champion of the world. All these years he has been steadily climbing toward that goal, and now the Gorilla refuses to meet him. Buck has said that if the Gorilla will not meet him in the ring, he will watch for him on the street and give him a thrashing. Buck's measurements are: Height, 6'1"; weight, 182. . . . .

"Well," she demanded again, "what does it mean, Buck?"

"Why—why," he gasped, "I don't know! I—I—"

"You don't know! That's strange!"

She glanced ironically from his scanty attire to the ring where Big Nelson lounged against the ropes, clad in fighting trunks and sweat-shirt.

"Mary," exploded Buck, "I didn't say any such thing—that I'd whip him on the street. It's a lie! Just for that, I will whip him next time I see him!"

"Say!" snarled Mike, "you learn to keep your temper, or you're whipped before you ever get in a ring!"

He glanced admiringly at the paper.

"That's good!" he murmured. "Advertising! Buck signed up to fight the Gorilla—Jack Mooney's out o' the fight game for good. They'll build up Buck's rep, an' let on like he's challengin' the winner, an' the Gorilla's scared o' him. Then when it gets out that Mooney can't fight, the customers'll force the coon to take Buck on instead—that'll be the story."

"But no one will believe it!" demurred Buck.

"They wont, wont they? They may not take the sinker, but they'll swallow the hook an' line. Anyway, some of 'em'll go to the fight to see if Buck is as big a dub as they think he is—jest go to see him knocked stiff."

"Well," she murmured resignedly, "I didn't want to see him turn professional, but he seems to be into it for this fight, anyway. All I can see for him to do is to get ready to win easily."

"Good sport. Mary!"

Buck slipped his gloved hands under her armpits and swung her delightedly from her feet, but something in her face made him set her down again.

"Buck," she murmured, "if you win this fight, I couldn't blame you for wanting to fight the champion. If you lose, I'd rather you didn't fight any more."

Mary wasn't one to rant, but Buck fully understood the quiet tones: if he lost and ever fought again, she was through with him; that was plain.

"Fair enough, Mary," he said firmly. "I like the feel of the gloves, but I like you better, so I reckon I'll have to win this match."

"Don't see why you shouldn't," she said carelessly, glancing over his rippling muscles. "Do you, Mike?"

"Huh?" Mike Cullinan spoke very judiciously. "Well—he *could* lose handy enough if he got careless. If the Gorilla's right cross-counter ever catches him on the button, he's out, that's a cinch—no one ever stood up to that punch yet. If he keeps his head an' boxes instead o' mixin' it, he'll win easy."

"Oh, Buck'll win!"

ON the night of the fight, her faith still remained unshaken, but in her faith she was almost alone. At the last moment the story had come out that while in the army Buck had not had a dozen fights, and that not one of those had resulted in a knockout for him. This was as far from the truth as the accounts Spike Maddigan and his partner had given to the papers, but it was given more credence than the latter—was a prophet, or a fighter, ever accepted in his home town? The betting had been five to nine in favor of the Gorilla, but now the odds began to climb steadily until at last, an hour before the fight, they were fifteen to one. In the shadows a short distance from the entrance to the huge outdoor arena the men who had acted as sparring-partners to Buck stood silently surveying the crowd that streamed through the gate.

"Golly, but it's a gate!" gasped Mike Cullinan. "You'd think it was a championship!"

"What the—" Slugger Mowry almost collapsed as gates swung to in the face of the crowd.

Big Nelson's jaw dropped, and his eyes protruded. It was with difficulty that he managed to gasp:

"A full house! I'll be—"

"Just think o' the money they've taken

in!" murmured Slugger. "I wonder if the kid has any chance at all."

Nelson shook his head regretfully.

"No," he murmured, "not a chance, unless he could go through the fight without getting hit. A man has to get used to the game, to fight when his head is so addled from punches that he don't even know when he's knocked down—but knows enough to get up at the nine-count. Poor kid! He'd have made a champ if he'd had time to come along right. As it is, this whippin'll break his heart—he'll never fight again; that little gal o' his don't have to worry."

"You're right, Big," grunted Mowry sadly. "We shouldn't have let him go through with it—it'll ruin him. What you think, Mike?"

With bowed head, Mike answered sadly, slowly:

"I think yo're right—he can't stand up six rounds. One of those right cross-counters, an' he's out."

"SO *that's* what you think of me!"

From the darkness beside them stepped Buck, his face a trifle pale, but his voice steady. That men gasped, and stared at each other blankly. Now, with confidence gone, Buck's last slender chance had gone. Beside him, white as paper, but steady, too, stood little Mary Ames—a little wren beside a great gaunt eagle.

"Why—why—Buck! I—"

Mike choked on his words, and stood staring at Buck helplessly.

"Oh, you needn't apologize, Mike! I've known all the time you didn't have any confidence in me, but I didn't know it was that bad. But listen here, Mike—"

Buck paused and slowly drew a roll of bills from his pocket. Then he continued in a very low voice:

"Here's that five hundred Maddigan gave me. It'll be the last nickel I have. I'm jest goin' to bet it on myself at fifteen to one, Mike, *because I'm going to win this fight*."

"And,"—Mary Ames stepped forward and placed her hand on Buck's arm,—"I have just three hundred in the bank, and I'm going to bet it on Buck, because he'll win."

In a moment she had disappeared into the darkness. A moment later and Buck, after telling the men that he would meet them in the dressing-room, had gone too.

"Damn!" grunted Mike. "Hanged if I don't put as much on the kid as he puts on himself, win or lose!" and he too had hurried off.

"Nope!" grunted Slugger Mowry. "I wont risk a nickel on the poor kid—*I* have some sense, anyway."

"Me too, Slugger! Me too!" Nelson shook his head. "The kid aint got a show. Let's go down to the dressin'-room an' wait for him."

THE semi-final had been declared a draw, after the two miners had wrestled and butted each other all over the ring for six rounds. The canvas had been freshly resined, and the ropes tightened. In his corner the Gorilla sat wrapped in his bathrobe, and beside him stood his two managers, who also acted as seconds when he fought. The murmur of discontent from the audience was rising rapidly to a dull roar. Still Buck Youngblood did not show up, and a messenger sent to his dressing-room a short time before had reported that he was not there. Besides the ring sat Mary Ames, one of the few of her sex in the audience, her face white as chalk as she glanced nervously toward the door of the dressing-rooms. Then the announcer arose and stepped to the center of the ring, where he held up his hand for silence.

"Ladeez an' gentlemen," he wailed, "as your local fighter, Mr. Youngblood, has not had the nerve to show up, we will have to declare the purse forfeited to the—"

"Hey! Wait a minnit!"

It was a bull-like voice, and the great figure of Slugger Mowry pushed hurriedly through the crowd. He climbed into the ring, and faced the audience.

"People," he roared, "Buck'll be here in a minnit now—he's changin' his clothes. He was kep' late because he had a lot o' money to bet on himself, an' couldn't get it covered sooner."

There was a moment of silence, and then a single loud voice from near the ring:

"Bull!"

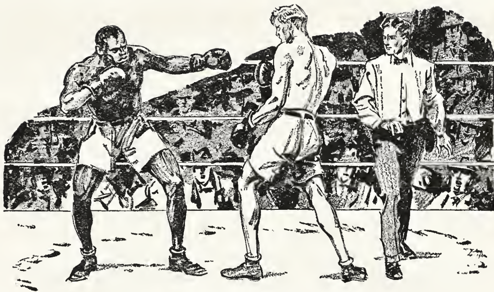
The roar was again mounting, but the Slugger's mighty voice was heard above it:

"Say! If whatever flathead yelled 'Bull' will come up here an' slip on a pair of gloves with me, I'll give you another semi-wind-up!"

"Send him up! Send him up!" yelled the crowd.

Then again came the voice of the announcer:

"He-e-ere he comes!"



Buck, very cautious, circled warily. Nor was the negro fighting—he considered it merely a matter of waiting.

IT was Buck he meant, not the disturber. Followed by Mike and Nelson, his seconds, he came quickly toward the ring and climbed through the ropes. Slugger grinned toward where his heckler was trying to hide behind the man in front of him, and swung off the platform, to drop into the empty seat beside Mary Ames. Now the announcer was introducing Gorilla Thompson, who was greeted by a mighty roar. And now Buck came to the center of the ring. Again the announcer was speaking:

". . . . . *Buck Youngblood, your fellow-townsman*—that is, he lives in this county."

There was a moment of silence. Then came a single voice:

"Limburger!"

A laugh went around, and quickly subsided. Then came a moment of silence, broken by the clapping of a tiny pair of white hands near the ring. The face of Mary Ames was drawn and white.

"You're a sticker, kid!" came the admiring boom of Slugger Mowry as his great hands crashed together.

But Buck had turned back toward his corner before the scattered applause broke out.

Now he glanced around calmly, and saw where this applause came from—from the little groups of cowboys here and there, far outnumbered by the miners and the outsiders who had come to see the fight.

"Thank the Lord!" he murmured to Mike. "If the boys weren't with me, I might be scared—I don't care anything for the others."

"With you! They've bet their saddles on you, to the last man of 'em, an'—"

CLANG!

With simultaneous bounds, the two men met in the center of the ring, everything forgotten but the business in hand. The left gloves of both were jabbing gently, but only to sink into the right hands opposite. Buck, obeying his manager's orders, was very cautious, and circled around the other warily. Neither was the great negro fighting—he considered it merely a matter of waiting until he was ready to knock out his much lighter opponent. There were a few *boos,* but not many, for most of the crowd seemed willing to allow the men a round to feel each other out. So it went the full three minutes, until the bell rang and both walked quietly to their corners. Mary Ames turned to the Slugger:

"Did—did Buck have that round?"

Mowry hesitated and gulped, but he thought he might as well tell the truth—it would make it easier for the girl when the blow came. His huge hand fell gently on her shoulder:

"Lady, they weren't fightin'; but the Gorilla gets the round for crowdin' the most. That kid—he's good, an' game as they make 'em, but he aint got a chance. The Gorilla'll slip him a right cross-counter, an' that'll end him."

"You mean—you mean he can't win!"

"No, lady—I wish he could," meekly murmured the Slugger.

"Well!" Mary whirled to him, flaring. "He'll show you, Mr. Mowry! He—can whip *anyone!*"

"I sure do wish—"

Clang!

This time the indignant *boos* of the crowd came loudly. They had paid to see a fight, and they wanted their money's worth. But for most of the round the fighters paid no attention, but sparred cautiously as in the first round. It was well toward the end of the round when Buck saw his opening, and suddenly led a straight right to the other's chin. The blow landed, but the Gorilla was drawing back, and so part of the force was lost. Still it tipped the woolly black head far over on the shoulder. A mighty cry suddenly came from the crowd:

"Cowboy! Give him another!"

But no crowd can change as quickly as a fight crowd. It was but a moment until the great roar had changed:

"Gorilla! Get him!"

"Kill the bum!"

"Break the cowboy's head!"

FROM one corner of the ring to another Buck was chased, and ever after him came that huge black. The crowd was mad now; not a man but was on his feet in the great arena as the bell rang, finding Buck covered up in his own corner. Not a man, but near the ring a tiny girl sat huddled pathetically in her seat, white-faced but dry-eyed. Suddenly the bellowing beside her ceased, and Slugger Mowry glared down at her.

"Good Lord, girl!" he roared. "Can't you see! No one can! Prettiest piece o' blockin' I ever saw! He wasn't hit once in the round!"

"Did he win the round?" asked a little voice to which hope was returning.

"Win! They wont know enough to give it to him—it takes a fighter to see what he did. Lord! I'd sparred lots with him, an' never thought it was in the kid!"

Buck, in his corner, was perspiring freely, but breathing easily. Mike was whispering advice in his ear—and doing little else. Many seconds—indeed most seconds—make their unfortunate principal's minute of supposed rest more strenuous than the time of fighting, but Mike Cullinan was not one of these. Maddigan and Spreckels were grinning amusedly as they swabbed their fighter gently—they should have seen the negro's danger, but did not. And now Mike was finishing his advice to Buck:

"An' *whatever* you do, don't let him catch you with that right cross-counter. He'll lay for you with it, an' no one ever stood up to it yet. He'll likely—"

CLANG!

Again the men were sparring in the center of the ring. From the crowd came cries to "finish the cowboy"—not five men in the house but thought the Gorilla could do so whenever he pleased. Slugger Mowry was leaning forward breathlessly. He would have died of embarrassment had he known that his fingers were digging into the knee of Mary Ames. But neither did she know it—next day she was to wonder why her knee was stiff and slightly blue. At length the Slugger managed to gasp:

"See the kid! See him! It's Corbett at his best!"

Indeed Buck did resemble in style that idol of fighters who forsook his work of bank-clerk to defeat the terrible John L. Sullivan. In much the same manner, with the same pantherlike grace, he shifted, dodged, leaped aside to return quickly from an unexpected quarter. But still he retreated before the great black who followed him in that flat-footed shuffle for which he was famous; still he was pursued from corner to corner, out to the center of the ring, and back to the corner again. The crowd was yelling wildly:

"Stop an' fight! Stop an' fight!"

"Boo! Boo! Boo-oo-oo!"

"Kill him, Gorilla!"

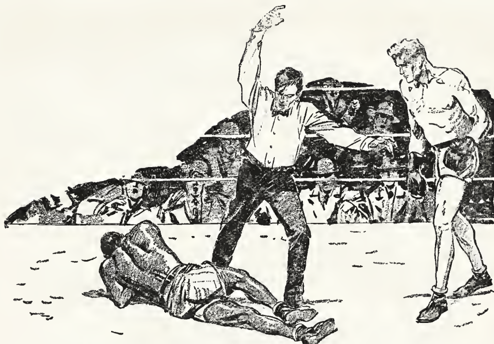
"Yellow!"

Mary Ames winced as she heard the last epithet, and her hand stole for comfort into the great paw of the Slugger. Without closing his astonished mouth, without taking his bulging eyes from the ring for an instant, the Slugger managed to gasp comfortingly:

"Lady, he's boxin', the kid is! He'll show 'em soon!"

"Boo-oo-oo!" came the concerted howl from the crowd.

SUDDENLY it happened, so quick that few saw it. Buck was in his own corner, blocking with both hands the blows that rained around him, unable to get back to the open ring. It seemed but a matter of



"Seven—eight—" The Gorilla lay like a stone, huddled on the floor. "Nine—"

seconds until one of the great black arms would shoot through his guard to end the fight.

And just then it happened. The Gorilla, who had never feared Buck—or, indeed, anyone else—became a trifle careless. For a fraction of a second he left his small chin unguarded; just a tiny fraction of a second, but that was enough. Buck's glove flecked out so quickly that few saw it, and before anyone knew what was happening, the great black body was on the floor, still.

"One—two—" tolled the referee, with swinging arm over the fallen fighter.

It was only now that the deathlike stillness of the astounded audience was broken, broken only by a sort of sigh of astonishment that swept over it like the wind sweeping over moaning pines.

"Three—four—"

Little Mary Ames felt herself fainting, but she knew that she must retain consciousness until the referee had counted ten.

"Five—six—"

Then the black bulk lurched to hands and knees. Now one knee came from the floor.

"Seven—eight—"

The negro gazed dazedly around.

"Nine—"

The hairy body shot forward with unexpected force, the long arms flying. But this time Buck did not give ground. He knew that the other must be still weak from that blow to the chin, and he wished to end the fight then and there. For the first time he stood toe to toe with the Gorilla, and swapped blow for blow. His head swam from the jars, but he could tell that the little eyes before him were partly glazed.

In a moment one of them must drop. He rushed still closer, and set his feet—

Clang!

For an instant the men, black and white, stood looking at each other, unable to realize that the round was over. Then Buck saw on the face of the other what he had least expected—a look of respect, followed by the trace of a friendly grin. It was a man to man look, a look that said that at last the great black realized that he had met his equal in the ring, and welcomed the contest. Buck realized as he turned to his corner that the Gorilla was indeed the sportsman he was reputed to be.

THE great arena was a madhouse. For the first time the people of Excelsior realized that their home man was a real fighter, and not a set-up to draw their money. Through the roars of the miners came the shrill yells of the scattered cowboys:

"Buck! Yee-ee-ee! Buck Youngblood!"

"That surely was Buck's round?"

Slugger grinned as he heard the timid voice beside him.

"Lady," he chuckled, "there's no need to count rounds or points now—some one's goin' to drop for the count, an' it looks to me like he's dark-complected. Buck's round! If the round had lasted a few seconds more, it would have been Buck's *fight*—the darky was dopey when the bell rang!"

At the ten-second whistle the seconds hastily ducked through the ropes. The faces of Maddigan and Spreckels were a study as they leaned back over the top rope to whisper a last few words of advice to the negro on whom their earthly fortunes were based. Mike's advice to Buck had been short and to the point:

"Use your own judgment, but don't take too many chances, *an' look out for the right cross-counter.*"

Clever ring-general that the old middleweight was, he was not burdening his principal with head-addling advice that the exigencies of the next round would likely make it impossible to follow without disaster. He was one of the few managers who could realize that his fighter had sound brains of his own.

"Buck, yo're doin' fine, kid! Only that right—"

Clang!

BUCK slipped across the ring, and met the negro almost before he had left his own corner. A straight left tipped the woolly head back. A right sent the negro back on his heels. But neither had had full force, and the Gorilla, although he gave ground and covered up, was not much the worse for them. A body punch was what Buck wanted to get in, a body punch with its sickening effect, not spectacular, seldom drawing applause, but taking the fight from the opponent instantly. But to reach that crouching body was impossible; try though he might, he could not get in a solid blow. Still, although he could not do what he wanted to, he was taking the round by a mile, as he pursued the other from side to side, from corner to corner. The arena was bedlam. Shrieks and howls of encouragement from miners, cowboys and outsiders alike came to Buck. Only the professional gamblers, who to a man had bet on the negro, were silent. But one friend of Buck's there was who had a long face, and that was Slugger Mowry.

"He's usin' himself up too much!" he grunted. "An' gettin' nowhere!"

Suddenly the negro made a counter-attack. Buck did not give ground, but stood toe to toe with him.

"The fool!" gasped the Slugger. "He shouldn't do that! *Aughrr—owwl!*"

The last a tremendous gasp of amazement. For there had come a crack of gloved fist meeting solid jaw—and the Gorilla lay at Buck's feet in a heap, the referee over him slowly, steadily, tolling the count. Amid the tremendous roar of the crowd the count went on.

"Seven—eight—"

The Gorilla lay like a stone, huddled on the floor.

"Nine—"

Clang!

"Saved by the bell!"

Spike sank back in his seat with a groan. Less than a second had come between Buck and the winning of the fight, for the referee had had his arm raised for the tenth count.

The Gorilla's seconds dashed through the ropes almost before the bell had rung, Spike Maddigan showing amazing speed for his great bulk, for he was in mortal terror now. The black was whisked into his corner unceremoniously. Smelling salts and cold water were hurriedly used, and then came the long bottle of water. Water was all that was allowed by the rules, the use of anything else constituting a foul that would give the other man the match; but those who were near that corner of the ring said that the smell from that bottle told of a far stronger liquid. The negro gasped, shook his head, gasped again, and relaxed as his seconds mixed expert manipulations with vitriolic advice and criticism. Buck, in his own corner, was perspiring profusely, but still breathing with comparative ease, considering the furious pace of the fight. Now the ten-second whistle had blown. The seconds were out.

CLANG!

The fifth round began with Buck darting across the ring as in the round before. Both he and Mike thought that a quick rush could finish the Gorilla. But neither had suspected the strength of that clear liquid in the long innocent-looking bottle. Buck found his opponent wabbling, apparently helpless. The negro feinted with his left, leaving his chin open for the moment. Buck took instant advantage of this, and shot in a straight left with all his force. It was a knock-out punch, but it passed through empty air beside the negro's neck. And it was then that the negro's

right arm shot out, fast as a whiplash. It curled around Buck's extended left on the outside, and whipped straight, as the glove found Buck's chin. Like a log, the cowboy dropped. It was the right cross-counter, always deadly, a certain knock-out when used by the giant black. . . . .

"Eight—nine—"

Into Buck's dazed consciousness came the tolling count. It was sweeping rapidly toward him from the darkness, mingled with the low buzzing. Like a spring, he bounded straight in the air, and stood there uncovered. Some instinct made him duck the forward-shooting glove partly, but it struck him in the jaw with sufficient force to send him down again. . . . .

"Two—three—"

His head had cleared more quickly this time. It was the same loud buzz, and the voice of the referee was racing closer and closer. He started to rise, but saw Mike frantically waving to him, and remained with one knee on the floor while the count tolled on:

"Four—five—six—"

There was a great roar from the audience, but it was a roar of disappointment more than of eagerness, for now almost all were for the cowboy's victory, his game fight having drawn their sympathies. Both hands of Mary Ames were twisted in the sleeve of the glowering Slugger, and her face was ghastly white.

"Seven—eight—nine—"

Buck was up again, and fighting; but the wise ones among the audience were leaving the arena to avoid the jam that would follow the knock-out—there was no more real fighting to be seen, they judged.

AGAIN Buck was on the floor. He had not felt the blow, so dazed had he been already, but he knew that it had been to the solar-plexus—his head was clearing, but his legs seemed paralyzed. . . . .

"Eight—nine—"

His unwilling feet managed to carry him with difficulty, and he ducked into a clinch. The referee parted them, but again Buck clinched. Again they were parted, and he heard the referee's voice:

"Cut the rabbit punch, Gorilla!"

Now they were in the middle of the ring. The Gorilla was breathing heavily, for he had used almost his last energy in the great effort to put Buck out. And then Buck saw his opening. With the strength of desperation, he shot his right to the Gorilla's heart. The great negro lowered his gloves and fell forward on his face. Buck tried to hit him as he fell, but he himself was too nearly out on his feet; his blow was wild, erratic.

THE Gorilla had taken a nine-count and was up again. They were standing toe-to-toe and slugging blow for blow. The din in the great arena was tremendous.

"Cowboy! Cowboy!"

"Give it to him!"

"Yip! Yip—ip—ip! Yee-ee!"

"Ohhhh! Cowboy!"

Buck knew that it takes long to recover from a heart blow, and that now or never he would knock the huge black out. He stepped closer. His own face was covered with blood from a cut on his forehead, but he scarcely realized that. He knew that his head tipped back often from blows to the chin, but he did not feel the blows. The black giant was bobbing and ducking in.

"Ugh!"

Unexpectedly the opening had come, but Buck had taken instant advantage of it. His right arm had whipped around the other's left, and his right fist had shot into the left side of the Gorilla's chin.

"The right cross-counter!" gasped Slugger Mowry.

The Gorilla was down, and Buck was walking blindly to his corner. Dazed though he was, he knew that he did not need to wait for the referee's slow count—it would be minutes before the fallen black could again rise to his feet.

"Was—was I knocked down sometime?" he asked of Mike.

"That's all right, kid! That's all right!"

The grinning Mike Cullinan was probably the proudest man in the world at the moment, as he threw his arm around Buck's shoulder.

At one side of the ring, hidden by the swirling, howling mob, little Mary Ames clung shiveringly to Slugger Mowry.

"Oh. Slugger, it was great! But I can't stand to watch him fight again—not even when he whips the champion."

The battered face of the old warrior broke into a chuckle as he gently patted her head:

"That's all right, little lady! Here's one old tin-ear is sure goin' to be close to the kid's corner when he does it—an' that'll be soon! That kid can whip the world in five rounds!"

Home Is the Sailor

A memorable story of the sea, and of the men who go down thereto in ships, by a writer who was for many years himself a deep-sea sailor-man.

I WAS sitting reading in the apprentices' quarters when I first saw him. It was the last night in port; the ship was going to sea in the early morning, and for once I was ready and willing for her to do so. The days of my four-year apprenticeship would soon be over. The three and a half years that lay behind me were none too pleasant to look back upon. She was a hungry ship, and ever since I joined her for my first voyage she had been in the west coast grain trade, making regular passages with general cargo round Cape Horn in June, July, or August, and returning to some European port in the latter part of the Northern winter. I had had my dose of it, and was eagerly looking forward to the end of one more passage, that I might leave her and go up for my second mate's certificate.

I was annoyed to see the youngster come into the half-deck, for I had hoped to have the little room to myself for this last voyage. The apprentice with whom I had hitherto shared it had finished his four years and left her.

The newcomer was slight, rather tall and lanky, with dark eyes and straight black hair. His expression was very open and eager. A boy of about seventeen, he looked soft even for a first voyager. His delicate face was pink and clear, his hands white. He looked shy. One could easily see that he was a "gentleman's son." The tip of a white handkerchief showed in his breast pocket. He wore a white collar, white shirt, and dark silk tie. And of course he was dressed in the customary spanking rig of an unsophisticated and unsuspecting green sea apprentice—a double-breasted blue serge suit with two rows of big bright brass buttons, an anchor on each of them. A smart new "badge cap" topped him off—a round blue cloth cap with a shiny black leather peak and gold chin-stay, the company's house flag in the loop of the stay. I could have easily guessed what he afterward told me: he supposed this was to be the rig that he would wear at sea.

"Going to sea with her?" I asked.

"Yes sir," he answered.

"Cut out the 'sir'," said I, and went back to my reading. I must have looked a bit rough to him, for my old brass buttons were anything but bright, and I'd long ago lost the chin-stay from my battered cap.

A longshore porter arrived with the kid's belongings, and I watched from the corner of my eye as he went to arranging them. When he had made up his bed in the bottom bunk with linen sheets, linen pillow-case, and two or three fancy blankets, he strung up some photographs

A knife flashed—a yell arose from the men. But the second mate's hand clamped on the man's wrist. "All hands stand back!" ordered the second.

By

BILL ADAMS

Illustrated by
O. E. Hake

on the bulkhead above it—father, mother, and a good-looking sister. That done, he looked about the half-deck with evident satisfaction. But when he caught my eye and I asked, "Why don't you hang yourself?" he gazed at me blankly, as though not sure that he had heard aright.

"My name's Chatters," said I. "What's yours?"

"Gillan, sir," he answered. Then, remembering that I had objected to "sir," he added, "Gillan. I beg your pardon."

I laughed. People on windjammers don't go around begging pardons.

"You'd better roll up those fancy sheets and stick 'em in the bottom of your sea-chest," I said. "You'll find you can sleep without 'em."

He looked very surprised, and glanced at my own bunk with its rough old blankets thrown back, and a wisp of straw protruding from the edge of my ancient "donkey breakfast" mattress.

Preparing to turn in, I took off my worn apprentice uniform and laid it away in my sea-chest, where it would remain until I needed it to go ashore in in Frisco. The morrow would be a long day, and I advised the kid to roll in. The last I saw of him before I fell asleep he was carefully folding his brass-bound suit, and laying it out on the table.

WHEN I awoke the night watchman was lighting our lamp. Day was just beginning to break. It was cold, and I snuggled down for a last few winks. The new chum turned out and peered about the half-deck as though seeking something. He gave me a long look, but supposing me to be asleep said nothing. I guessed what he was after; he was wondering where to wash his face and hands! Sea apprentices wash once a week at sea: on Saturday evening or on Sunday morning; unless it is bad weather, when such washing as they receive is attended to by the sea on the deck. Fresh water isn't plentiful. We take our fresh-water baths in the equatorial rain squalls.

In a moment the kid was dressing himself in his white shirt, collar, and brass-bound suit. When dressed, he made up his bunk, shaking the pillow and straightening the sheets. Then he hurried out to the deck, bright-eyed and plainly much excited.

Some one came bellowing forward. The mate, who had been with her on her last voyage, was a quiet sort of man, the taciturn kind that you find in lots of ships —long ago grown accustomed to taking things as they come. The second mate was new. I had not yet seen him.

I was about to step from the half-deck when I heard a shout.

"Get to blazes out o' the glad rags! D'ye think ye're a blasted ornymint?"

As Gillan hurriedly reëntered the half-deck, half stepping, half falling over the door coaming, the second mate caught sight of me.

"Down to the locker, the two o' ye, an' look alive!" he growled; then went on forward to rouse out the foremast hands.

Gillan looked at me, speechless. I said, "We've a little job to do. Better get a move on and change into dungarees."

When you read of the sailing of a ship you read of the folks ashore who wave and cheer, while the sailors wave and cheer back. Flags fly gayly in the offshore wind. The crew stamps round and round the windlass, singing: *"There's plenty of gold, so I've been told, on the banks of the Sacramento,"* or, *"Waye, aye, you rolling river!"* You never hear tell of the chain locker.

The morning was just opening. Gulls wheeled by. The river glistened. The tug-boat lay ahead, waiting till our anchor was aweigh.

The hands at the windlass were rousing up a chantey as I lit a lantern and led the new chum, now dressed in dungarees and a work-shirt, below to the 'tween-decks. It was dark down there. The singing of the men on the fo'c's'le head grew faint and far away. I wriggled backwards through the manhole in the forward bulkhead, and he followed me awkwardly.

IT was pitch dark in the chain locker; utterly quiet. There was a stale, dank smell of old rust. We were far below the level of the river.

Passing the new chum a chain hook, I bade him grab hold of the incoming cable and help me flake it down as it clanked in. As he set his chain hook in the chain he looked up to the blackness above, and a dollop of mud fell in his face. Muddy water dripped on him. He was much too uncomfortable, much too perplexed, to ask any questions. The iron chain hook was hurting his hands. I guessed that lacing his own shoestrings was about the hardest work that he had hitherto done.

When the cable was all in and I led the way back to the deck it was raining. There was no longer any blue sky to be seen. The tug-boat had dropped us, and we were on the road to Frisco. The shore line, already indistinct, was fast fading. The wind was cold. In oilskins and sea boots, the men were hurrying from rope to rope while the second mate bellowed orders. Some were aloft on the yards, loosing sail.

As I hopped into the shrouds to go up and lend a hand on the main I had a good look at the second mate. He was a big, shock-headed, bulgy-eyed man, and although without oilskins or sea boots and already wet through was apparently quite unconscious of either cold or wet. Catching sight of the new chum, he shouted to Gillan to jump aloft; but after watching his clumsy efforts to get into the rigging bawled, "Get down! Get down! Ye'll break yer blasted neck!" He pointed Gillan to where the men were hauling out on the topsail chain sheets, and bade him lay back with them.

The rain came down harder, the wind piped up. She began to roll a little. By the time I came down from aloft she was lying over, tossing up a smother at her bow. The new chum was wet through and shivering. His palms were badly blistered. I too was wet through, of course. But I was well used to that.

At close to eight bells, breakfast time, I was working beside the new chum. "Hungry?" I asked. I knew well enough he was hungry. He was almost everything that was miserable—but not quite everything as yet. And she was rolling so now that he couldn't stand without holding on to something.

When he followed me to the half-deck at eight bells I saw that his brass-bound suit had fallen to the deck, and I picked it up and tossed it into his bunk.

"You'll want that when you go ashore in 'Frisco," I told him. He didn't hear me. He had dropped to a seat on his sea-chest.

For breakfast there was of course the usual thing—hardtack and strong bitter coffee. Sorry for the kid, I poured him a pannikin-full.

"Drink hearty," said I, "You've four giddy years of it ahead."

He lifted the pannikin and tried to drink. But he'd been accustomed to good coffee, with sugar and cream in it. His face turned suddenly green, and he rose and hurried to the deck. When he came back the rain was driving down in sheets. At my advice he managed to change into dry things, and to get into his oilskins and sea boots. His oilskins were good. But some one had sold him a pair of felt-lined sea boots—once wet, never dry—articles of use, perhaps, to steamer men or yachtsmen, who do not often get their sea boots full of water. Too seasick to attempt to eat, he crept into his bunk, his brass-bound suit crumpled beneath him.

In ten minutes or so the second mate appeared and ordered us out. By now the seas were lopping in over her bulwarks and water flowed to and fro with every roll.

"You'll soon get used to it," I told the kid. "The first year's the worst." Tailing on to a rope beside him, I showed him how to use his weight. "It wont be so hard on your hands if you use your weight right. There's a right way and a wrong way of pulling on a rope," I said.

He looked at me gratefully. His body was now protected from the wind by the new oilskins, so that he was hot instead of cold. His pale face was sweaty. But as we gave her more sail she grew wetter and before long he was knocked down and bowled over by a sea, and so was wet through again.

Hour after weary hour went by, every minute one of acute discomfort. The shore was long lost to view. A gray rain-hid sea tossed all about.

The carpenter looked from his shop door and called to the second mate, "She's getting a good start, Mister."

"Aye," replied the second, knee deep in white water. "Five months o' this an' we'll see 'Frisco."

When we went below for a rest at noon the sea-sickness was scared out of the lad and he was ravenously hungry. There was hardtack and a hunk of fatty pork for dinner. He gulped down his share of the pork, tried to nibble a pantile, and crawled into his bunk. I had to shout and to shake him to awaken him when the turn-to bell struck at one o'clock.

AFTERNOON passed as the forenoon had passed. I was at the wheel, and saw him from time to time, floundering about the watery decks at the heels of the men, or helplessly clinging to a handrail in the swirl of white water. It was six o'clock before we were below again. Hardtack and skilly for supper. The latter, though supposed to be tea, bore slight resemblance to tea. The new chum drank a pannikin of skilly, ate a couple of pantiles, and once more made for his bunk. The wind howled, the sea roared, but he knew nothing of them.

While the kid slept the second mate came into the half-deck and asked me for a fill of 'baccy. " 'Bout out of your time, aint you?" he asked me. He had seen that I was no green hand: I saw that for all his noise and bluster he had a kindly eye. There was no bully about him. He was merely a sailing-ship second mate who when there was work to be done liked to have it done and be through with it. When he rose to go he stopped by the new chum's bunk, and fingering a corner of a linen sheet shook his head unbelievingly.

When I roused the kid at eight bells, two hours later, wind and sea were gone down, and the ship was riding easy with a slow gentle roll. The night was very dark and a light steady rain was falling. I took him to the quarter-deck where, by the light of a lantern, the mates were picking the men into two watches. That done and the wheel relieved, the second mate called to Gillan, "Get up to the poop and keep the time!"

Remembering my own first night at sea, I felt sorry for the new chum. Having to watch the clock and strike the bell every half-hour there would be no chance for him to snatch a sleep. Should he happen to snooze, so that the bell was not struck and the man at the wheel not relieved on the tick of ten o'clock, not the second mate only, but the men too would be growling at him.

He struck the bell all right till nine-thirty. It was my wheel at ten, and I went up a minute or two ahead of time, in case he should be asleep. Asleep he was, on his feet, his head tucked down in his breast. Water dripped on him from the spanker, but he was unaware of it. I woke him, and as he went to strike four bells I heard the water squelching in his sea boots. It was very cold.

Until midnight he leaned against the wheel-box behind me and snoozed. Whenever I thought it about time to strike the bell I poked him with the toe of my boot.

At midnight we went below to the half-deck together. Probably no feather-bed had ever seemed so good to him as that narrow little bunk had now become.

When the second mate's watch was roused out again at four of the morning and he had to go back to the poop to keep the time till beginning of the day's work at five o'clock, he could hardly keep his eyes open. His fingers trembled as he slowly dressed. The linings of his sea boots were sodden. He gasped as he put his bunk-warmed feet down into them.

I didn't see him again till breakfast time. Then, when I entered the half-deck, he was folding his brass-bound suit and laying it away in the bottom of his sea-chest. He didn't ask any questions.

DAYS and nights passed. Night after night he huddled on the poop, keeping the time. Day by day in his watch on deck he worked at dull jobs: polishing brass-work and binnacles over and over till they shone like mirrors. Hour after hour, kneeling on the hard deck, he chipped rust from bolts and bollards. Always when his time came to go off duty he crawled into his bunk to be dead to the world for the brief three and three quarters hours of a sailing-ship sailor's watch below. In the dog-watches of an evening, busily preparing for my second mate's examination, I had small time to notice or to talk with him.

Disconsolate and solitary as the new chum was, he began to harden. His blistered hands healed slowly. The skin on his palms and fingers grew tougher. Forced to it by the unceasing invective of the second mate, he learned to walk and to run without holding on, and became accustomed to the clumsy weight of oilskins and sea boots. Lean as he had been when he first came aboard, he was leaner now. The brightness was gone from his eyes, the expectancy passed. Always too tired, too wretched for thought, he was frequently bowled over and soaked to the bone by boarding seas.

For two weeks we sailed rough waters beneath a cloud-billowed sky. The lad's fancy blankets were salty and damp; his linen sheets had been put away. When occasionally one or other of the mates dropped in to the half-deck of an evening, and, bending over my shoulder, helped me with "day's work" and "longitude by chronometer" problems, neither of them spoke to or noticed Gillan.

By and by the sun came out and the sea shone blue. Wet clothing was hung to dry. Men with worn oilskins begged the mate for a little linseed oil to dress them with. Sea boots were given a dressing of dubbin.

One of the foremost hands who had an old and leaky pair of sea boots saw the new chum's felt-lined boots laid out to dry in the sun and offered a trade.

"I'll give ye a week's whack o' pork for them boots," he said.

Gillan, always hungry, made the trade, and thereafter for a week had a double whack of pork at dinner-time. When the week was gone he was hungrier than ever, and took to hanging around the galley door in the dog-watch, hoping for scraps from the cook. I warned him that he'd find himself in trouble if the skipper saw him sponging on the cook, but my warning was futile. So one evening the skipper saw him eating cabin scraps by the galley door, and from then on he found himself kept at work in the dog-watch every evening for a week. The men snickered at sight of the kid chipping iron rust and polishing brass long after the sun was gone.

"Well, I warned you, didn't I?" I said. He made no reply, but I saw a momentary new expression come to his face. Hot angry sparks awakened in his eyes.

After the dog-watch was his own again he tightened his belt and kept away from the galley. The pinkness was gone from his cheeks. His hands were stained and grimy. Often there was a queer far-away look to him. He spoke only when spoken to. The shyness that had been so noticeable when first I saw him was still there. Looking back, I remember a sort of dignity in that shyness.

I worked with the foremast sailors, all of whom were busied in the rigging, reeving, splicing, and getting everything in trim for the southern latitudes. Ignorant of all sailor work, the new chum was kept at his chipping and polishing, working all alone.

Leaving the trade-winds astern, we ran into blowy latitudes again, and, with no sea boots now, Gillan's feet were always wet. The fellow who had traded for his felt-lined boots had ripped the linings out and went dry shod.

"Where's your sea boots?" the second mate asked him; and, hearing that he had traded them for food, told him that he was a young fool and must take his medicine.

"The skipper's got sea boots in the slop chest. He'll sell you a pair," I told him. Evidently remembering the time when the skipper had seen him accepting scraps from the cook, he reddened and made no answer.

ONE evening shortly afterward a stiff squall caught her just after nightfall, and all hands were called to shorten sail

in a hurry. Gillan and I climbed to the main royal. No sound reached us but the sound of wind and sea as we swung up the rolling rigging. He had never been aloft, never been off the deck before. The moon beamed on roaring waters.

When I had secured my own side of the sail I went over to help him.

"Get the snow off her!" shouted the second. "D'ye think this is a blasted picnic?"

"How d'you like *sailoring*?" I shouted.

His eyes very bright, he glanced at me from amidst folds of white billowing canvas. His cap had blown away and the wind tossed his black hair about his pale forehead. He made no reply, but while I passed the gaskets and lashed down the sail he stood erect on the foot-rope and gazed up to the full round moon above us. His lips were parted. His face delighted and eager, he drank deep of the crisp wind.

When I came down into the topmast rigging he was still standing at the royal mast head, gazing now skyward, now to the glistening crested seas almost two hundred feet below.

The second mate looked up from the topsail yard.

"D'ye think ye're a blasted ornymint?" he bellowed.

His sensitive face white, his eyes gone dull, the new chum came into the half-deck looking as though some one had struck him. The blustering ways of second mates had never troubled me. To me, long ago disillusioned, the sea was merely a means to a living. Nothing more.

"It's no use to carry a grouch," I told him, and added, "You can swallow the anchor when she gets in if you want to."

"What's that?" he asked, frowning.

"Skip," said I. "Desert. Run away. Lots of us do."

As I brought out my navigation books I said, "When I came to sea I supposed that all I'd have to do would be to walk up and down in my brass buttons, with a big telescope under my arm."

He made no answer, and I went to my reading and figures.

He had taken off his boots and was chafing his cold feet with equally cold hands.

"See here, kid," I said, "you can't go around the corner without any sea boots."

As though he had not heard me, he remarked, "I thought that too."

"Thought what?" I asked.

"About the brass buttons and the telescope," he answered.

"Lots of us do," I replied, laughing. "I don't know who started the idea."

"*They* thought it too," said he, and nodded to the pictures of his people.

"You'd better go ask the skipper for a pair of sea boots," I said.

"I wont!" he snapped, the angry sparks awakening in his eyes again.

I shrugged my shoulders; I wasn't the little beggar's keeper.

The big winds blew unceasingly. Each day was drearier than the last. The weather was too wild for chipping iron rust or polishing brass-work now. Seas slapped their crests across the bulwarks. Her head sails dripped. Lifelines were stretched from fo'c's'le to poop, and all hands were set to making robands and chafing mats beneath the cold shelter of the fo'c's'le head. The men talked of stormy latitudes ahead, and spoke of missing ships, and ice on wintry seas.

"Here's him as'll not take no more voyages to sea, I'll bet," said one, turning to the new chum. They snickered at the new chum, while day after day the rain and sleet drove down. . . . .

There came a still day when the large slow-floating snowflakes fell, and men with blue noses stamped their feet and beat numb hands upon their oilskins. The second mate bawled:

"Get them brooms along now! Shovel the snow off her!"

The kid's teeth chattered as he flung snow over the bulwarks. No sail flapped. No block creaked. Monotonous mutterings came from the men. Now and again, with a great beating of many-jointed wings, a bird rose from the dark water, flew a little way, and settled with a splash. The second mate, petting the ship's dog in the chartroom doorway, saw Gillan watching the birds. The kid's face was rapt—everything forgotten but the great white birds

"Get the snow off her!" shouted the second. "D'ye think this is a blasted picnic?" .

The sleek dog came from the chartroom and strolled about the poop, indifferent eyes upon the new chum as it passed him.

The skipper came from the cabin, and called to the steward on the quarter-deck, "Fix a good supper for old Ranzo, steward! It's hard weather on a dog." He noticed the kid, and reëntered the cabin, to be back in a moment with a pair of sea boots.

"Here, you, boy!" he called, and tossing the sea boots to the deck returned below.

Gillan's blue lips were voiceless as he picked up the sea boots. A tantalizing smell of hot food came from the pantry. Whining and wagging its tail, the dog passed down the companion ladder to the saloon where mate and skipper sat down to their suppers.

It was almost dark. Now and again a bird-cry broke the silence.

When we went to the half-deck for our supper of hardtack and skilly there was a sound as of many cattle lowing far away, and coming slowly nearer. We were eating our hardtack, and sipping the thin hot skilly when the wind caught her.

FROM that night on there was small time for talk or for books of an evening. There was no roband making by day. In brief lulls of almost ceaseless storm we snatched what sleep we might. Again and again rang the order, "*All hands on deck!*" Again and again at the changing of the watches one or other of the mates called, "Turn in all standing! Keep handy the watch!" Time after time we turned in "all standing"; sleeping in our oilskins and sea boots, lest a sudden call come. After a week of steady gales two of the crew laid up, and, moaning in their bunks, feigned sickness to escape the misery of the deck.

Aloft in furious days and hooting midnights, cold and wet were the unremitting round of all but the two malingerers. Rope-toughened skin on palms split open. Finger-joints cracked, the red flesh showing at the bottom of the cracks. For want of anything better we rubbed pork grease on our "sea cuts." I taught the new chum to tie rope yarns round his wrists and waist and ankles—"soul and body lashings"—to help keep the flooding water out. But still he was always wet. Salt-water boils swelled on his wrists, just where the chafe of the cold stiff oilskin came. "Wait till you get 'em on your knees," said I. For I was limping. Our bedding was wet, our mattresses moldering; the great seas swamped in whenever a door was opened for the fraction of a moment. There were days when we must do without our coffee

or our skilly. Days when the sole food available was hardtack.

How Gillan managed to exist during the three full weeks we spent in beating round the corner I don't know. One looked after oneself. Often I caught glimpses of him clinging to the lifelines, waist-deep in white smother. Once I saw one of the crew jerk him from the onrush of a sea just in time to save him from being swept overboard.

The second mate had no time to notice the new chum now. Had he stayed in his bunk, no one would have cared or have missed him. But again and again I found him beside me, aloft on racking topsail yards where none but tried men could be of any use. His lips numb, his face ghostly white, his bruised knuckles raw and red, he did his best at fisting frozen canvas with the rest of us. . . . .

When misery was become wellnigh our second nature, there came at last a clear morning with a light wind from the south. She was past the corner! By breakfast-time we had given her full sail, for the first time in over a month. Countless birds about her, she lifted to the gentle undulations of a southerly swell. The word went round that there would be no work that day.

Some of the men were watching the birds. Some hung wet clothes to dry. I was seated on the hatch, Gillan beside me washing his salt-water boils in a pannikin of fresh water, when the second mate passed by.

I guessed his errand, for on his face was such a contemptuous scowl as he had never worn when savage winds were choking, and wintry waters pounding him. A moment after he had entered the fo'c's'le the two malingerers were hurled from it, and fell sprawling to the deck. They were speedily booted to their feet. His sea-split hands clamped about their necks. Barefooted, bareheaded, dressed in their underclothing only, their eyes bulging, their lips whimpering, he pushed them before him with extended arms and so brought them to the cabin door. Presently they returned forward and slunk into the fo'c's'le, their rating reduced from "able-bodied" to "ordinary" seamen, their pay cut down.

THE crew were gathered by the fo'c's'le door, jeering the malingerers, when the second mate once more came forward. Stopping in front of Gillan, he looked at the new chum's miserable hands.

"How d'ye like the sea?" he asked. Before the kid could answer the second turned to me.

"The skipper wants ye aft," said he.

My sea cuts and salt-water boils were instantly forgotten, for now I remembered that this was the day on which my four-year apprenticeship was over. The second mate strolled after me as I made haste toward the cabin door.

I LEFT the cabin gleefully. The mates were talking by the quarter rail, and I told them that the skipper had signed me on as third, and had told me to bring my things aft. Henceforth I was to share the second mate's room, eat at the cabin-table, and draw pay.

My first job as third mate was to order the malingerers from the fo'c's'le, and set them to work upon their hands and knees scouring the decks where constant inflooding water had caused the slippery green sea growths to obtain a hold. Hate me as they might, they dared not grumble. While no one else worked that day, they pushed flat sandstones to and fro, bucket of water beside each of them to keep the stones wet.

While the second mate and I were seated together on the after hatch, Gillan passed by. I was removing the old apprentice buttons from my shore-going jacket.

"Four giddy years, and you can do the same," I said as the new chum glanced at me.

"I'll bet ye dollars to doughnuts he swallows the anchor," muttered the second mate; the kid, overhearing the words, blushed crimson.

Next day the crew were set to sailor work in the rigging. But the new chum was given a bucket of water and a holystone and put to scouring the deck beside the two malingerers. They knelt in a row together.

Working in contented twos and threes, the sailors talked while they worked. When none of the mates were near, the two malingerers muttered to one another, cursing the mates, and ship, and leering at Gillan.

"You was a blasted fool to go to sea, wasn't you, puppy?" said one.

Gillan pretended not to hear. The fellows swore at him and taunted him, sneering at him because the sandstone

pained his split hands. He took no notice of them.

While everyone else's hands healed, the new chum's hands remained sore—chafed by the stone, and continually dipped in salt water. Day by day the malingerers jeered him, calling him foul names, and damning him as one who in days to come would be an officer.

WEEKS passed. We picked up a warm southeast trade-wind. All but the three holystoners were busy painting the ship. We were counting the days to 'Frisco.

Evening by evening I worked at my navigation problems, in the room I shared with the second. The new chum dwelt alone in the half-deck, with his salt pork, hardtack, bitter coffee and thin brown skilly. And the pictures of his people hung on the bulkhead.

On a warm Sunday such of the crew as possessed any brought out their shore-going clothes to give them an airing.

Gillan was hanging his brass-bound suit to air as I passed.

"Going to wear 'em when she gets in?" I asked.

He understood my meaning—knew that I was wondering whether he had made up his mind to swallow the anchor. His lips parted, he turned sharply round, as though about to speak. But he was silent. I saw sparks waken in his dark eyes once more.

As I strolled away to my room the two malingerers came from the fo'c's'le, and, seeing the new chum brushing his brass-bound jacket, nudged one another.

In the second dog-watch that day the second told me to get the kid to the wheel and show him how to steer. I found him in the half-deck, seated at the table, with paper before him and pen in hand. We should be in in a few weeks, and he was writing home—to the people whose pictures smiled on us from the bulkhead. I wondered of what miseries he was telling. The men were singing in the fo'c's'le as he followed me aft. The malingerers walked the fore-deck together. The mates sat talking quietly on the after hatch. The sleek dog dozed near by.

With a soft beam wind just keeping her sails full, she scarcely needed steering, and I left her to him. The rosy sunset shone on his thin white face. The sails glowed above him; the sea glowed below. The second mate called up to me where I sat on the taffrail: "It wont be long now till we take a walk ashore!"

The sun went down. The sea rippled and sang under her counter, beneath her helmsman's feet. The moon rose in the gloomy east. Stars winked, amidst slow-moving little clouds.

His hands on her wheel-spokes, the binnacle light shining on his down-bent face, the new chum seemed almost a spectral boy.

I was standing at the door of the carpenter's shop talking with Chips, when the new chum was relieved and went forward. The moon shone bright on deck-house and on deck. A murmur of talk and snatches of laughter came from the fo'c's'le.

As Gillan passed me I heard a harsh laugh on the fore-deck. A sneering voice said, "Ye looks as good in 'em as the puppy'll ever look!"

The new chum started, then stopped. For an instant he stood still. As he sprang forward I followed.

Beside the hatch stood one of the malingerers, with Gillan's brass-bound jacket on. Catching sight of Gillan, he threw the jacket off and tossed it to him.

"'Ere, puppy!" he sneered.

The jacket fell to the deck. It was I who picked it up. As I did so I heard the sharp click of a fist upon bone. The fellow who had been wearing the jacket snapped out a foul oath.

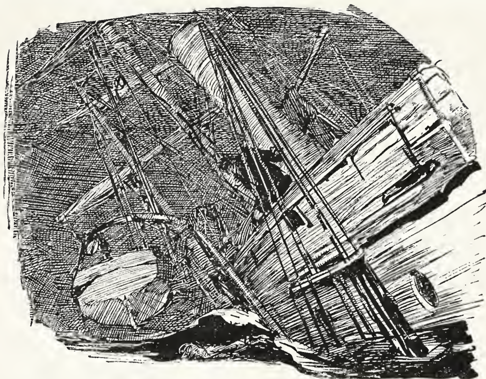
The crew came streaming from the fo'c's'le. Chips hurried from his shop, the cook from his galley. Gillan was on his back on the deck, but for an instant only.

As the new chum staggered backward and went down again, the second mate strode up.

"Back—back, all hands!" he ordered.

A cry of delight came from the crew as the new chum, head down and shoulders hunched, leaped for his antagonist. But as the fellow's fist beat the youngster down for a third time they made as though to close in. Growling, *"Back! Back! Back!"* the second mate flung them away.

The malingerer glanced quickly round the circle of onlookers. His lip was bleeding, and as Gillan rose once more he backed, shifty-eyed, to the bulwarks behind him. The new chum's face was



A wild cry from the dark deck. . . . . The wind howled; seas smashed on hidden hatches. It was no night to put a boat out!

the color of chalk. Sparks blazed in his eyes.

A knife flashed in the moonlight. A yell rose from the men. But the second mate's hand clamped on the malingerer's wrist, and the blade whirled overboard.

"Back! All hands stand back!" ordered the second, and waved the incrowding onlookers away.

Ducking his head and throwing his arms up wildly, the fellow sought ineffectually to guard himself. A hoot of laughter rose. His hands upheld before his frightened face, he leaped away from Gillan, blundered blindly through the cheering crew, and was gone, followed by a bellow of laughter and oaths.

For an instant Gillan stood white and panting, the men about him, the second mate's approving hand upon his shoulder. . . . .

The moon went out. A squall piped through the rigging. Dimly seen sails bellied drum-tight, and as the ship reeled down the mate s and skipper's voices rang above the sudden tumult. All hands ran to the gear. While the ship raced toward 'Frisco we lowered and clued up sail, shortening her down in a hurry as squall upon staggering squall burst upon her.

Men who swung upon the foot-ropes gathering in her canvas shouted jocosely to one another, jesting of the fight. Snatches of laughter sounded from the swaying spars.

Cloud fringes parted, and the moon rode out. The sea twinkled and shimmered, high crests snowy, curves molten, hollows cavern-inky.

Jesting as they descended toward the deck, the men in the main topmast rigging cried up to Gillan above them, telling him he'd make a bucko mate some day—calling him *"sailor."* They told me afterward how his face shone, how his dark eyes danced.

AT the moment that the new chum was coming down over the futtock shrouds the second mate looked up, and saw a gasket hanging loose upon the lee main yard.

"One o' you sailors lay out on the main yard an' make that gasket up," he shouted.

A fresh squall smothered the moon. Sea and sky were darkened. Laughter and cheers were mingled with the night's roar.

The second mate's watch went below, the mate's men to coiling up the tangled

ropes. As the full force of the wind took her and she lay far over, sprays flying thick and her lee bulwark down in the water, I went to my room.

I had kicked off my boots and was half undressed when a wild cry from the dark deck beside the lee main braces startled me. As man after man took up and repeated that cry I burst through the alleyway door and sprang half naked to the night again. The wind howled. Battering seas smashed on her hidden hatches. Sheets of invisible water flew over ship and crew. Voices were drowned. Ripped from its bolt ropes, I heard a sail whip into ribbons high above me. Chains clattered on the metal masts. Wind upon wind. Water waist-deep, shoulder-high. Confusion. Skipper, mates and sailors, impotent to save. It was no night to put a boat out!

The squall passed. Cloud fringes parted and the moon broke out. The sea twinkled and shimmered, its high crests snowy, its curves molten, its hollows cavern-inky.

MORNING opened clear. Full sail by breakfast time, the ship racing for port.

The mate beckoned me, and together we went to the half-deck to gather the new chum's belongings. His oilskins swung on their hook. Fallen to the deck, his pannikin rolled to and fro. A letter lay upon the little table. From the bulkhead above his fancy blankets his people smiled on us.

We took his oilskins down, and rolled his blankets. We laid his people's pictures where they could not see us, within his sea-chest on his gay brass-buttoned suit. The second mate came in as we were done.

The mate picked up the unsealed letter. The same thought was in the mind of each of us: The tale of all his misery would be there; hunger and cold, and three hard heedless men. Either one of us, all of us, might have made the misery less!

The second mate and I looked at the mate; he gazed back at us.

"*You,*" he muttered, and thrust the letter toward me.

I read, aloud at first—then scarce whispering: . . . . "They say the first year is the hardest. *It is not hard.* . . . . I'll soon be home."

A L'Outrance

By

H. K. Cassels

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

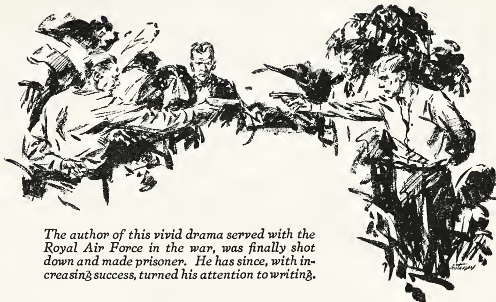
HAMILTON GREY and Captain Lyng Barliss quarreled, thoroughly and disastrously, the first time they ever met. There was no doubt about the quarrel and little doubt in the minds of any of us who were witnesses that it could not end after that first meeting.

It was in Shanghai, where I was a newcomer, that it took place, and it started in that great cosmopolitan club which, from inside, you could imagine was situated in New York or London, if it were not for the Chinese boys who move silently about to the quiet orders of the starch-fronted members.

I had met Barliss once before, but knew him better by his army record. He was supposed to be on leave, but the rumor among us Americans was that he was in Shanghai on Intelligence work; for during the few years since the war he had managed to invent plausible excuses for visiting Mosul and Singapore and other places suspiciously interesting. Of the two I knew Hammy Grey better, for during the month I had been there, working in the Chinese hospital on the effects of a new drug, I had spent most of my leisure hours in his company.

We had been sitting in the lounge, Hammy and I, during that pleasant half-hour after dinner when a drink and a little conversation seem in order before taking up the more serious amusements of the evening. Two or three other men had joined us, and then Dallas, of the consular service, came in with a friend and introduced him as Captain Lyng Barliss.

We had all heard of Barliss and urged him to join us for a drink. He looked the part for his adventures, a little taller than



The author of this vivid drama served with the Royal Air Force in the war, was finally shot down and made prisoner. He has since, with increasing success, turned his attention to writing.

average, with the carriage of one who spends much time in the saddle; and though his skin was not pretty, he was darkly handsome, looking as if Spanish blood had leaked somewhere into his ancestry. It would be difficult to make friends with him, I thought, but well worth the trouble.

Now, Hammy is one of those burly blonds who belie their appearance by a vague, dreamy manner. They formed such a contrast that my eyes traveled between them, and I felt at once that there was some constraint. They were sitting on neighboring chairs with their drinks on a small table between them, and Barliss was talking quietly to Hammy.

"Risely Hospital?" I heard. "You were lucky to come through all right, eh?"

"Very lucky," Hammy agreed softly. "Only wonderful nursing saved me."

"You knew Gilaine Ash?"

Jim Dallas was talking about a new polo pony he had just picked up cheap. "Only five-fifty! And with careful handling I think—"

I was interested in hearing about the pony, but with one ear I listened for Hammy's reply.

"I knew her very well indeed. You know I did."

BARLISS turned toward him in his chair, and though he did not raise his voice, there was something in it that caught the attention of the others.

"So you *are* the man! I thought you must be. You *are* the man who tried to steal her from me!"

Hammy did not answer at once. The strangest look came over his face, more puzzled than indignant, and he passed a hand over his eyes.

"Is that the way you look at it?" He spoke thoughtfully as if to himself. Then he turned sharply, so that the faces of the two men were only a few inches apart over the table.

"That's one thing," he went on, his voice crisper but still quiet, "that's one thing in my life that I've always felt was blameless. You don't understand, or you'd be thanking me, thanking me this first time we meet. But that doesn't matter. What is inexcusable is that, after all, you've made Gil unhappy."

Dallas had stopped talking about the pony, but the two were quite oblivious of anything outside themselves, and something kept us all spellbound, listening to them.

"So you still make it your business!" Barliss snapped.

"Since you're not living with her any more—" Hammy began.

At this point they were both standing. There was a sudden movement, a crash which broke the tension, and in a moment we were all between them. I cannot swear that a blow was struck, but I saw that the table was over and Hammy had drawn his handkerchief and was wiping something wet from his cheek. Still none of

us said anything, till the pompous voice of an English colonel broke in on us from further down the room. He was quite right too, though in that crisis the words he used sounded ridiculous.

"Sirs, if you please! This is a club, a gentlemen's club!"

That set us all moving. Dallas had Lyng Barliss by the arm and led him to the door. "I'll drive you down the Bund," he was saying. "You haven't seen it at night yet." Another man had hold of Hammy and said: "What about that bridge? May as well play over in my digs; it'll be quieter." And next minute they had all gone except myself.

SOMETHING made me walk over to the window to see their cars start. They left separately and in different directions, and I stood there gazing down and wondering. I was looking out on a busy street in the Foreign Settlement, where familiar automobiles were driving past and the foot-passengers were mostly white; yet it was distinctly not American. Every now and then a ricksha went by with a rattle of wheels and a padding of bare feet, but there was more than that difference. Some tang in the air, the color of the sky, or the distant hum of the Chinese city made me feel terribly a stranger. Through a gap in the buildings I could see signs of the shipping in the harbor, cranes lifting their pairs of arms to the sky in imploring gestures, the masts and funnels of as queer a collection of craft as can be found in any one place on the seven seas.

Could Hammy be so badly in the wrong, I wondered. Barliss was not the sort from whom one would expect such behavior. Quick-tempered, yes; a doer rather than a thinker, I judged; a man of few ideas, but those few as fixed as the stars, and among them would be chivalry and honor.

Yet it was even harder to think badly of Hammy. He was so simple, so transparent, one of those rare people who can talk naturally about their deeper feelings. He liked poetry, flowers and children, as many of us do, but did not mind saying so, and he did it without seeming priggish. He acted up to it too—made friends with the most atrocious kids in the streets.

Two men can be rivals in love, in business or sport, and yet be the best of friends. But they may jostle in the street-car and be deadly enemies for life. "It can't end like that," I sighed to myself, and looking round at the clock, I saw that I had been standing there for nearly an hour. I decided to pay Toby Thompson a visit. He was an old newspaper man who had known Hammy all his life, and since he and I had been friends in Boston years before, I thought he would tell me anything he could. I was frankly curious and a little alarmed.

"I SUPPOSE I've got to tell you the story," Toby said, after I had recounted what had happened. "I know you'll use discretion, but you'll worm it out, anyway. Just give me a minute to get the facts straight in my mind."

We both made ourselves comfortable in men's fashion and then he started, puffing between-times on his pipe.

"You never knew Gilaine Ash, now Mrs. Barliss? Well, they got engaged when she was seventeen and he was nineteen, two days before he went overseas for the first time. You can imagine it! They'd known each other all their lives and he—well, you've seen him. Think of him at nineteen, in a uniform, when uniforms were still strange, and he, for all his fine temper, letting her see that he was a bit scared. And she at seventeen, romantic as the devil and all worked up about the war. Of course she took his ring and returned his kisses and said: 'Yes, darling, when you come back!'"

"Quite touching!" I said, a little disappointed at the conventional beginning. "So he came back a hero and married the princess."

"Fool!" He shot one of his fierce looks under the bushy grey eyebrows. "You've been reading medieval romances. But she wasn't shut up in a tower, and he was gone four, I guess five, years. After the war he was on that boundary commission, then roving military attaché—you know, glorified spy work. What sort of girl do you take her for? Now, he *is* that sort—medieval type of soldier. To him she stood for home and beauty and the rest of the blah. She was the personification of all the pleasant things he'd left behind; and that sort of idea grows on a man."

He was silent then, puffing away while I sipped; so I prodded him with a question.

"What sort of girl is she?"

"Good stuff!" he grunted. "Real family too! Pretty, did you say? Damn that word! Not a dizzy flapper, if that's what you mean. She's beautiful, beautiful in

every sense, but too romantic—hasn't quite enough humor. She nursed."

He was silent again till I said impatiently: "Well, go on. Where did Hammy come in?"

"She nursed him, and they fell in love. Didn't you get that? She nursed him for six months, and when he came out, John Ash gave him a job—John Ash, her father. It was a good job too, but it wasn't through Gilaine he got it. Hammy looks easy-going, but he's a hell of a smart man and just the man Ash needed. That was just luck. For he saw Gilaine every day, and Lyng didn't come back. He could have, too; that's the funny part. I happen to know that he needn't have gone gallivanting round Asia Minor. He asked for that job."

I thought I could see an explanation. "I was bug-hunting once in the Paraguayan Chaco," I told him. "I was out six months, and during the last two I was planning every day what I'd eat when I reached my first real dinner. In the end I got scared of that meal and hardly dared order it in case I should be disappointed. I was, too, and nearly sick. Since then I've always been afraid of reaching promised lands. They're better while they're only promised."

He nodded. "I can see that. Moses was lucky; Pisgah was the best place for him. Perhaps Lyng felt something like that—scared to bite the apple because it looked too good. Anyway, there it is! He certainly worshiped her and yet he didn't come back. And Gilaine and Hammy were desperately in love; they wanted to get married. They were seeing each other every day and that state of things couldn't go on for ever. But Hammy had the idea that it wouldn't be right unless they waited till she had seen Lyng again; thought it wasn't fair to expect Gilaine to know her mind when she hadn't seen him for so long. Then he was offered this Trade Commission job; and he took it on the run, came straight here, I believe, without even saying good-by."

I cannot swear that a blow was struck — but I saw Hammy had drawn his handkerchief and was wiping his cheek.

I gaped at him. I had been living so intently in the story that I felt as if I knew Gilaine myself, the warm, lovely girl, passionately in love with Hammy Grey. And I knew Hammy, how deep his feelings ran. "Why? Why?" was all I could stammer.

Toby knocked out his pipe and took a judicial attitude.

"It may be possible for a man to be too punctilious, but in this case I think Hammy did well. The girl was only twenty-two then, nearly three years ago, and he was giving Lyng exactly the same chance he had had himself. Lyng was to be back within a year and would find the

field clear, but after a year Hammy meant to go back and fetch her. That was the understanding." Toby paused for effect. "Before that time came, she'd married Lyng."

"God! These women—!"

I GOT up to stretch my legs and walked over to the window. Toby's fifth-story apartment looked toward the Chinese city, and it was a relief to gaze down on those low houses and narrow streets and to gather the impression of busy life that ran through them. It was as if that human beehive were saying to me: "Look! Here is life, half a million lives, being born, acquiring what they can, and dying! Why distress yourself because two people are unhappy? Life goes on. When we die, there will be another half-million in our places, no better or worse, no more happy or unhappy."

But Toby leaned over and took hold of my arm. "Sit down again," he said. "You started me on this; now let me finish."

"Well," I answered, "what more is there to say?" And I turned to him but did not leave the window, for I wanted that reassuring activity within sight.

"I don't want you to think badly of Gilaine. She messed things up all through; but being what she is, fine as she is, I don't see how you could expect her to have acted differently. Lyng came and burnt incense. That means a lot to a woman from a man like him. She'd always liked him very much; besides, she couldn't really understand why Hammy deserted her like that. It hurt her and shook her confidence in him; it seemed too calculating in a lover. No woman would think a scruple like that was enough reason for her man to leave her. I saw a good deal of her just then, and I know she was frightened. Hammy stood for passion, which might not last, but Lyng was an old friend as well as a worshiper; he did things for her, gave her things and took her out; he behaved like a beau, as they call it, and she hadn't had any of those queer creatures hanging round her since she got engaged. Also he was famous, and his attentions flattered her. Anyway, they got married, just when Hammy's year was up."

"And why wasn't the marriage a success?" I asked. "Apparently they aren't living together."

"Incense gets sickening. A pedestal is a windy place; no wife wants to stay there all the time; she wants shelter. I can imagine Lyng arriving home in the evening and kissing her fingertips. Why, when I saw them together they were like strangers who happened to be dinner partners, extraordinarily polite. She could have thawed him out if her heart had been in it, but that was with Hammy. If Hammy had been dead, it might have been different; I think she was still hoping for him. Those two had been like puppies playing together. Theirs was sunshine love, a-lover-and-his-lass sort of thing, not a perpetual minuet."

"Will they get a divorce?" I asked again, but he shook his head.

"Of course Lyng would rather not, being in the service, and she doesn't know what she wants. Hammy, naturally, hasn't written to her since the wedding. Come on! I'm through now. Let's cheer ourselves up by going down to the Grand and watching the dancing."

SO we went there and supped; and we watched representatives from all the white races on earth dancing a foxtrot to an American tune, drinking French wines and choosing their food from a hotel menu standardized the world over. And we had red wine with our lobster, which may have been the reason I did not sleep afterward; but there was another reason contributing, for as we parted, Toby raised his right hand in his usual patronizing salute.

"Listen, boy! Something may happen in the next few days. Now don't be afraid of butting in if there's any need; that's one reason I wanted you to know the story."

Saying which he banged the door of my taxi, for I was dropping him on my way home, and walked into his apartment without another word.

The fact remains that I did not sleep well, which is unusual for me. Between four and five in the morning I began to doze, but at seven I woke with a start to find Hammy, still in his dinner-coat, standing by my bed.

"Sorry, old man, but I need your help," he said. "Are you awake enough to listen to me?"

I made him wait till I had let up the blinds, sponged my face with cold water and slipped into a bathrobe. I knew something serious was the matter, and I wanted time to collect my wits. Hammy was walking about the room rolling an unlighted cigar in his mouth.

He swung quickly around and a swarm of armed Chinese, bursting through the bamboo, halted as he fired.

"It's the best way," he was muttering, "the only sensible way. We're going to fight—have a duel—one of us kill the other." Then he looked up at me; our eyes met, and of the two pairs his were the steadier.

Usually one would feel inclined to laugh at a man who talked like that and ask him how he got that way. But Hammy was too obviously serious, and my own temper was not so good after my bad night. I pushed him into a chair and held a match to his cigar.

"Pull yourself together and talk sense. Your nerves are all shot. Do you want a drink?" I was trying to take my own annoyance out on him.

He refused my offer and spoke with uncommon gentleness.

"I'm talking sense. It's all arranged, but I want a second, and I came to ask you. No, don't try to change my mind; it's settled. I'm asking you because you're leaving Shanghai in a few days, so it will be less embarrassing for you than for any of my other friends. Besides, you're a medical man."

I lighted a cigarette and sat down opposite him, trying to make my sleepy brain react sensibly to his preposterous statements.

"You really mean it?" I asked. "You're not drunk? I don't seem able to get the idea." It did not occur to me to ask who was the other principal. I knew too well.

"It's all settled," he repeated patiently. "Jim Dallas is acting for him. If you agree to act for me, he'll be round to see you at eight o'clock. Will you?"

Then I remembered Toby's last words to me. "All right! I'll do what I can," I conceded. "I don't know much about how it should be done, but I'll see Dallas anyway."

He thanked me and shook my hand; and once more he said:

"Remember, it's settled definitely. Don't try to get us out of it. If you did, it would only mean that one of us would murder the other, whereas a duel is not quite murder: it's just the best way out of certain situations. In this case it's the only way out. We'll use pistols, and we're pushing upriver in a launch to find a good place. I'm going home now for a little rest, and I'll stay there till you call for me."

Up to this moment he had been talking as calmly as if arranging a round of golf for the afternoon; but now, for just a moment, he lost control. He turned away from me to hide his face, but I could see his hands twisting savagely at his soft hat. His voice was choking.

"I must be right! What else—what other way is there? I don't mind getting shot at, but will I have the nerve—can I really shoot at him? He ought to get it. It's his turn to get—" Then his control came back, and he turned a calm face toward me.

"Well, come round to my rooms," he said, and walked out.

A BATH, a shave and some breakfast made me feel more comfortable and inclined to laugh at the talk of a duel. Hammy's nerves were on edge, I told myself, but after a rest he could easily be talked round. So when Dallas arrived soon after eight, I at once put it to him in that light. "Last night there was hot blood," I said. "When they've cooled off, it will be absurd to keep it up."

To my surprise, Dallas did not take my point of view. "Their blood wasn't so hot last night, and this thing has been brewing for years. I know just how you feel, but I was trying all night to fix it up, and I've become convinced that it's impossible. Do you know the story?"

"Yes, at least most of it! But what is there new?"

"They never met before." And Dallas explained what I had half seen already. "If they *had* met, it might have been quite different, but now things have been dammed up too long, and there's only one outlet."

"But we can't let them shoot each other," I exclaimed. "Why, man, this is the twentieth century!"

"I know, and this is Shanghai, not Boston or even 'Frisco. You don't realize how they feel. One or other of them has simply got to get out of the way. When he cooled down, Lyng was very upset about the incident in the club; he knows he's made a mess of his marriage; and it was all I could do, before the duel idea came up, to keep him from shooting himself, so as to free Gilaine and leave the field to Hammy. I don't know how you feel about that, but I'd rather one of them shot the other, under the form of a duel, than that he shot himself."

It seemed more than ever pathetic to me when I thought of Gilaine, eight thousand miles away, without anything to say in the matter. But Dallas was a man whose opinion I respected, and when I saw that he was resigned to the situation, I really gave up hope.

"We can't get dueling pistols," he told me when I asked about the arrangements. "Of course we have service revolvers, but it wouldn't be right for Lyng to have any extra advantage—I know he's a good shot—so I got Japanese automatics, seven-shooters. As a doctor I suppose you'll bring a first-aid outfit; of course we'll have to do all we can, but you know what the idea is."

I did not have the courage to ask him to explain, but I could guess that one of them was not expected to return.

"I've got a fast motorboat," he went on, "so we can go a good distance up the little river. There are plenty of suitable places on the bank, and if one of them is killed, we'll have to say that the Chinks fired on us. It's not impossible, though it will start no end of inquiries; but that can't be helped. Everyone thinks Lyng is here on Intelligence work, which will make it easier to hush matters up, and since he's only just arrived, we have good reason for showing him round a bit."

I could find no objection to these arrangements, so we decided to make a start at two o'clock the same afternoon.

That was a fantastic ride, not only on account of our errand which tied our tongues and kept us ill at ease, but also from the circumstance that we were racing in a modern speed motorboat among Chinese river junks, which were sailing in their slow, immemorial fashion about those ancient channels. There were just the four of us, Dallas driving. I tried to start a conversation by asking questions about the strange methods of fishing we could see in use, but as no one took me up, I let the effort drop.

WE were soon clear of the harbor shipping, but for some distance the water was crowded with native craft of all sorts, busy on mysterious errands. They thinned out as we got farther upriver, and after an hour's run we turned into a narrow channel, sheltered by islands from the main stream and almost deserted. Here we went more slowly, and we nosed around the sandbanks for another hour before Dallas found what he wanted. It was a shelving beach where the boat could be gently grounded, and where a growth of young bamboos almost completely shut off the view.

As soon as we had landed, I asked Dallas whether there was yet any arrangement as to how far apart the principals were to stand. Hammy at once interrupted.

"I think Barliss and I agree in principle about this duel, so I wish to propose that we have what the French call a *duel à l'outrance*. Only one of the guns

will be loaded with ball; we will choose our guns by chance, and fire at point-blank range on a given signal."

Barliss agreed to this terrible suggestion at once and without any sign of being shocked. Nothing I could say would change their minds, so Dallas and I withdrew to load the automatics. Dallas must have known beforehand what would be suggested, for he had some blank cartridges, and with them he filled one of the guns. When they were loaded, he held them both behind his back, and I chose one of them at random. I handed it to Hammy, who did not even glance at it. Barliss took the other, and Dallas placed them about six feet apart.

"Both release your safety catches," he instructed them, "but keep your muzzles pointing to the ground. When I drop my handkerchief, you will both raise your guns and fire. Are you ready?"

THE safety catches clicked. I glanced at their faces. They were both set in tense lines, and Hammy's had lost its usual bright color; neither of them showed any other signs of nervousness. But for two small fishing boats on the main channel of the river, I could see no sign of life. The bamboos rustled in a faint breeze. There was no other sound. Then Barliss spoke.

"One minute, please!" Dallas lowered the hand in which he held his handkerchief. "I want to ask you something, Grey. If I die, will you go and see Gilaine and try to make her happy? I think she still loves you."

It sounded more than generous in such a moment, but Hammy did not unbend. He bowed slightly and said:

"That's understood. Of course if you survive, you will not mention this, except to let her know that I am dead."

Neither of them seemed to have any thought for themselves; nor in their grave way of speaking could I detect any sign of hatred between them. I was reminded of the story of two drowning men, both clinging to the same life-belt, who decided by lot which of them should let go. What they were doing was really a more friendly act than letting their rivalry continue.

They both looked at Dallas, who raised his hand again. Still none of us knew which gun was the loaded one.

"Ready, gentlemen!"

The handkerchief dropped, and both muzzles rose steadily. There was a report, a single report. It was several seconds before I realized that it was the blank which had been fired, and that Barliss had not pressed his trigger but was slowly lowering his gun.

Hammy started to tremble, and I stepped forward, thinking he was going to fall. But he waved me back.

"Hurry up! For God's sake, hurry up and shoot!" he said to Barliss.

"I never meant to shoot you," Barliss answered. "When I thought it over, I realized that would do no good. It's for me to get out of the way, and I hoped it would turn out so. I think you could make Gilaine happy. I know I can't. As it is—"

He swung quickly round, and *crack! crack! crack!* went his automatic. A swarm of armed Chinese, who were bursting through the bamboos, halted as he fired. Two of them crumpled and fell.

"Push off the boat." Barliss snapped the order, and we jumped to obey as to a military word of command. Then three of the attackers opened fire, but at him, not at us.

At the first shot Barliss fell backward and rolled over onto his face. Seeing him down, they rushed us, evidently wishing to make us prisoners. We were already afloat, and two of them dashed into the water to seize the boat; but Barliss, still on the ground, opened fire at them. I counted three more reports, and it flashed into my mind that he was keeping one cartridge.

DALLAS opened the throttle as several shots were fired at us. Hammy had been working frantically on his automatic, and had now ejected the blanks and reloaded with ball.

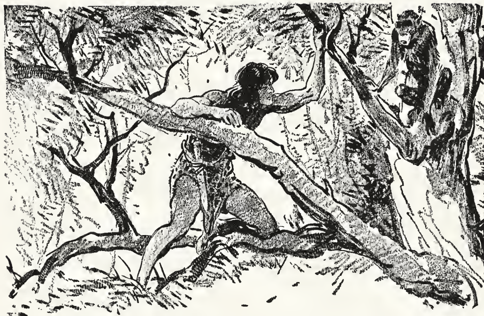
"We must go back," he cried. "We can't leave him there."

Dallas shook his head hopelessly, and I grabbed Hammy round the waist or he would have jumped into the shallow water. He struck at me, as I held him, and cried again:

"Let me go! I must help him! My life's owing, not his."

But at that moment another shot sounded from Barliss, a different note from that of the guns carried by the Chinese.

We all knew what that last shot meant.



TARZAN,

This, the most alluring romance published in years, takes you through swift and surprising adventures in the heart of the African wilderness.

The Story So Far:

DEEP in the African forest Tantor the elephant dozed in the shade; and upon his great friendly back likewise dozed that strange being Tarzan —English boy who by curious chance had been brought up by the giant apes of Africa, had renounced civilization and become lord of the jungle.

Deadly peril threatened Tarzan: for journeying toward the Abyssinian hinterland came the Arab sheik Ibn Jad, seeking to loot a rumored treasure city; and a hunting party from the camp of the Arab raider spied Tantor lolling in the shade. The Arab Fahd fired at Tantor—and missed; but the startled elephant plunged off headlong through the forest; and Tarzan, knocked senseless to the ground by an overhanging limb, was made captive by the Arabs.

Brought bound into the presence of the Sheik Ibn Jad, Tarzan asked by what right the Arab invaded this domain of his own lordship, and demanded his immediate release. The Sheik insisted that he was not a slave-raider as Tarzan supposed, but a peaceful trader; and he offered to release Tarzan in exchange for permission to pursue his journey unmolested by the forest folk over whom Tarzan ruled. The jungle lord declined, and was placed in a tent for the night to think it over.

The Arabs, however, decided to murder him, and, claiming he had escaped, to hide the body. Indeed, Tollog, the Sheik's brother, had already attacked the captive with a knife, when Tantor, returning, snatched the tent from over the unequal combat, hurled Tollog into the jungle, and made off with Tarzan.

And now a new menace threatened the peace of Tarzan's domain. Two American hunters, Blake and Stimbol, had arrived with their safari of negro porters. Because of Stimbol's brutality to the blacks, the two had quarreled, and had decided next day to divide the safari and go their separate ways, Blake with his camera and Stimbol with his wanton rifle.

Tarzan, however, ordered Stimbol back to the coast, but granted Blake permis-

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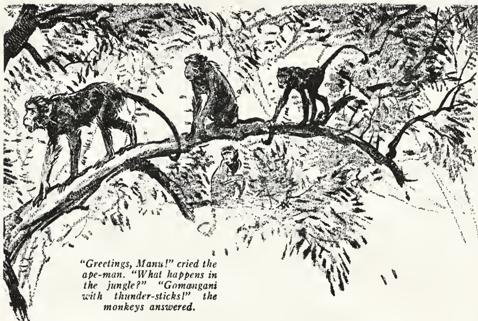


"Greetings, Manu!" cried the ape-man. "What happens in the jungle?" "Gomangani with thunder-sticks!" the monkeys answered.

Lord of the Jungle

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

sion to continue making camera studies of the wilderness folk. The two Americans next day set forth on their several ways, but Adventure was by no means done with them. For Stimbol, deserted by his blacks, fell into the hands of the Arab raider Ibn Jad. And to Blake came an even more extraordinary experience when, wandering lost and alone in the mountainous Abyssinian hinterland, he was halted by two negroes clad in a curious medieval costume, and taken through a tunnel and to a strange castle. A portcullis was lifted—and he found himself in the presence of mail-clad knights speaking English of the Crusades. . . . .

Meanwhile Tarzan had rescued from the attack of a lion one Zeyd, a young man of Ibn Jad's party, who had been driven out of it because of the enmity of the powerful Fahd, his rival for Ateja, the Sheik's daughter.

"Fahd," explained Zeyd, "did plot against me to make it appear that I had tried to take the life of Ibn Jad—which, before Allah, is a lie that reeketh to heaven—and I was to be shot; but Ateja, the daughter of the Sheik, cut my bonds in the night, and I escaped." *(The story continues in detail:)*

AS Tarzan traveled south with Zeyd, Ibn Jad trekked northward into el-Hábash. Fahd plotted with Tollog, and Stimbol plotted with Fahd, while Fejjuân the Galla slave waited patiently for the moment of his delivery from bondage, and Ateja mourned for Zeyd.

"As a boy thou wert raised in this country, Fejjuân," she said one day to the Galla slave. "Tell me, dost think Zeyd could make his way alone to el-Guâd?"

"Nay," replied the black. "Doubtless he be dead by now."

The girl stifled a sob.

"Fejjuân mourns with thee, Ateja," said the black, "for Zeyd was a kindly man. Would that Allah had spared thy lover and taken him who was guilty."

"What meanest thou?" asked Ateja. "Knowest thou, Fejjuân, who fired the shot at Ibn Jad, my father? It was not Zeyd! Tell me it was not Zeyd; but thy words tell me that, which I well knew be-

fore. Zeyd could not have sought the life of my father!"

"Nor did he," replied Fejjuân.

"Tell me of this thing!" cried Ateja.

"Thou wilt not tell another who told thee?" he asked. "It would go hard with me if one I am thinking of knew that I had seen what I did see."

"I swear by Allah that I will not betray thee, Fejjuân," cried the girl. "Tell me, what didst thou see?"

"I did not see who fired the shot at thy father, Ateja," replied the black, "but something else I saw before the shot was fired."

"Yes, what was it?"

"I saw Fahd creep into the *beyt* of Zeyd, and come out again bearing Zeyd's matchlock. That I saw."

"I knew it! I knew it!" cried the girl.

"But Ibn Jad will not believe if thou tellest him."

"I know; but now that I am convinced perhaps I shall find a way to have Fahd's blood for the blood of Zeyd!" cried the girl, bitterly.

FOR days Ibn Jad skirted the mountains behind which he thought lay the fabled City of Nímmr, as he searched for an entrance which he hoped to find without having recourse to the natives.

The country was sparsely settled, which rendered it easy for the 'Aarab to avoid coming into close contact with the natives, though it was inconceivable that the Gallas were ignorant of their presence. If, however, the blacks were willing to leave them alone Ibn Jad had no intention of molesting them unless he found that it would be impossible to carry his project to a successful issue without their assistance, in which event he was equally ready to approach them with false promises or ruthless cruelty, whichever seemed the more likely best to serve his purpose.

As the days passed, Ibn Jad waxed increasingly impatient, for search as he would, he could locate no pass across the mountains, nor any entrance to the fabled valley wherein lay the treasure city.

"*Billah!*" he exclaimed one day. "There be a City of Nímmr, and there be an entrance to it; and by Allah, I will find it! Summon the Habush, Tollog! From them or through them we shall have a clew in one way or another."

When Tollog had fetched the Galla slaves to the *beyt* of Ibn Jad the old sheik questioned them, but there was none who had definite knowledge of the trail leading to Nímmr.

"Then, by Allah," exclaimed Ibn Jad, "we shall have it from the native Habush!"

"They be mighty warriors, O brother," cried Tollog, "and we be far within their country. Should we anger them and they set upon us it might fare ill with us."

"We be Bedaùwy," said Ibn Jad proudly, "and we be armed with muskets. What could their simple spears and arrows avail against us?"

"But they be many and we be few," insisted Tollog.

"We shall not fight unless we be driven to it," said Ibn Jad. "First we shall seek, by friendly overtures, to win their confidence and cajole the secret from them.

"Fejjuân!" he exclaimed, turning to the great black. "Thou art a Habashy. I have heard thee say that thou well rememberest the days of thy childhood in the hut of thy father, and the story of Nímmr was no new story to thee. Go, then, and seek out thy people. Make friends with them. Tell them that the great Sheik Ibn Jad comes among them in friendliness and that he hath gifts for their chiefs. Tell them also that he would visit the City of Nímmr and if they will lead him there he will reward them well."

"I but await thy commands," said Fejjuân, elated at this opportunity to do what he had long dreamed of doing. "When shall I set forth?"

"Prepare thyself tonight, and when dawn comes depart," replied the Sheik.

AND so it was that Fejjuân, the Galla slave, set forth early the following morning from the *menzil* of Ibn Jad, sheik of the fendy el-Guâd, to search for a village of his own people.

By noon he had come upon a well-worn trail leading toward the west, and this he followed boldly, guessing that he would best disarm suspicion thus than by attempting to approach a Galla village by stealth. Also he well knew that there was little likelihood that he could accomplish the latter in any event. Fejjuân was no fool. He knew that it might be difficult to convince the Gallas that he was of their blood and there was against him not alone his 'Aarab garments and weapons, but the fact that he would be able to speak the Galla tongue but lamely after all these years.

"The house of your father is not in the country of the Gallas," growled the warrior. "You come to rob us!"

That he was a brave man was evidenced by the fact that he well knew the suspicious and warlike qualities of his people and their inborn hatred of the 'Aarab and yet gladly embraced this opportunity to go amongst them.

How close he had approached a village Fejjuân did not know. There were neither sounds nor odors to enlighten him, when there suddenly appeared in the trail ahead of him three husky Galla warriors and behind him he heard others, though he did not turn.

Instantly Fejjuân raised his hands in sign of peace, and at the same time he smiled.

"What are you doing in the Galla country?" demanded one of the warriors.

"I am seeking the house of my father," replied Fejjuân.

"The house of your father is not in the country of the Gallas," growled the warrior. "You are one of those who come to rob us of our sons and daughters."

"No," replied Fejjuân, "I am a Galla."

"If you were a Galla, you would speak the language of the Gallas better. We understand you, but you do not speak as a Galla speaks."

"That is because I was stolen away when I was a child and have lived among the Bedaùwy since, speaking only their tongue."

"What is your name?"

"The Bedaùwy call me Fejjuân, but my Galla name was Ulala."

"Do you think he speaks the truth?" demanded one of the blacks of a companion. "When I was a child, I had a brother whose name was Ulala."

"Where is he?" asked the other warrior.

"We do not know. Perhaps *simba* the lion devoured him. Perhaps the desert people took him. Who knows?"

"Perhaps he speaks the truth," said the second warrior. "Perhaps he is your brother. Ask him his father's name."

"What was your father's name?" demanded the first warrior.

"Naliny," replied Fejjuân.

At this reply the Galla warriors became much excited and whispered among themselves for several seconds. Then the first warrior turned again to Fejjuân.

"Did you have a brother?" he demanded.

"Yes," replied Fejjuân.

"What was his name?"

"Tabo," answered Fejjuân without hesitation.

The warrior who had questioned him leaped into the air with a wild shout.

"It is Ulala!" he cried. "It is my brother! I am Tabo, Ulala. Do you not remember me?"

"Tabo!" cried Fejjuân. "No, I would not know you, for you were a little boy when I was stolen away, and now you are a great warrior. Where are our father and mother? Are they alive? Are they well?"

"They are still alive and well, Ulala," replied Tabo. "Today they are in the village of the chief, for there is a council because of the presence of some desert people in our country. Came you with them?"

"Yes, I am a slave to the desert people," replied Fejjuân. "Is it far to the village of the chief? I would see my mother and my father, and also I would talk with the chief about the desert people who have come to the country of the Gallas."

"Come, brother!" cried Tabo. "We are not far from the village of the chief. Ah, my brother, that I should see you again whom we thought to be dead all these years! Great will be the joy of our father and mother.

"But, tell me, have the desert people turned you against your own people? You have lived with them many years. Perhaps you have taken a wife among them. Are you sure that you do not love them better than you love those whom you have not seen for many years?"

"I do not love the Bedaùwy," replied Fejjuân, "nor have I taken a wife among them. Always in my heart has been the hope of returning to the mountains of my own country, to the house of my father. I love my own people, Tabo. Never again shall I leave them."

"The desert people have been unkind to you—they have treated you with cruelty?" demanded Tabo.

"Nay, on the contrary they have treated me well," replied Fejjuân. "I do not hate them, but neither do I love them. They are not of my own blood. I am a slave among them."

THE party moved along the trail toward the village as they talked, while two of the warriors ran ahead to carry the glad tidings to the father and mother of the long-missing Ulala, and so it was that when they came within sight of the village they were met by a great crowd of laughing, shouting Gallas and in the fore rank were the father and mother of Fejjuân, their eyes blinded by the tears of love and joy that welled at sight of this long-gone child.

After the greetings were over, when every man, woman and child in the company must crowd close and touch the returned wanderer, Tabo conducted Fejjuân into the village and the presence of the chief.

Batando was an old man. He had been chief when Ulala was stolen away. He was inclined to be skeptical, fearing a ruse of the desert people, and he asked many questions of Fejjuân concerning matters that he might hold in his memory from the days of his childhood. He asked him about the house of his father and the names of his playmates and other intimate things that an impostor might not know, and when he had done he arose and took Fejjuân in his arms and rubbed his cheek against the cheek of the prodigal.

"You are indeed Ulala," he cried. "Welcome back to the land of your people! Tell me now what the desert people do here. Have they come for slaves?"

"The desert people will always take slaves when they can get them, but Ibn Jad has not come first for slaves, but for treasure."

"*Ai!* What treasure?" demanded Batando.

"He has heard of the treasure city of Nímmr," replied Fejjuân. "It is a way into the valley where lies Nímmr that he seeks. For this he sent me to find Gallas who would lead him to Nímmr. He will make gifts and he promises rich rewards when he shall have wrested the treasure from Nímmr."

"Does he speak true words?" demanded Batando.

"There is no truth in the beards of the desert dwellers," replied Fejjuân.

"And if he does not find the treasure of Nímmr perhaps he will try to find treasure and slaves in the Galla country to repay the expense of the long journey he has undertaken from the desert country?" asked Batando.

"Batando speaks out of the great wisdom of many years," replied Fejjuân.

"What does he know of Nímmr?" asked the old chief.

"Naught other than what an old medicine man of the 'Aarab told him," replied Fejjuân. "He said to Ibn Jad that great treasure lay hoarded in the City of Nímmr and that there was a

beautiful woman who would bring a great price in the far north."

"Nothing more he told him?" demanded Batando. "Did he not tell him of the difficulties of entering the Forbidden Valley?"

"Nay."

"Then can we guide him to the entrance to the valley," said Batando, smiling slyly.

CHAPTER XI

Sir James

AS Tarzan and Zeyd journeyed toward the village in which the ape-man purposed to enlist an escort for the Arab upon the first stage of his return journey toward his desert home, the Bedouin had time to meditate much upon many matters, and having come to trust and respect his savage guide, he at last unbosomed himself to Tarzan.

"Great Sheik of the Jungle," he said one day, "by thy kindness thou hast won the undying loyalty of Zeyd, who begs that thou shalt grant him one more favor."

"And what is that?" asked the ape-man.

"Ateja, whom I love, remains here in the savage country in constant danger so long as Fahd be near her. I dare not now return to the *menzil* of Ibn Jad even could I find it; but later, when the heat of Ibn Jad's anger will have had time to cool, then I might come again among them and convince him of my innocence, and be near Ateja and protect her from Fahd."

"What, then, would you do?" demanded Tarzan.

"I would remain in the village to which thou art taking me until Ibn Jad returns this way toward el-Guâd. It is the only chance that I have to see Ateja again in this life, as I could not cross the Soudan alone and on foot, shouldst thou compel me to leave thy country now."

"You are right," replied the ape-man, "You shall remain here six months. If Ibn Jad has not returned in that time, I shall leave word that you be sent to my home. From there I can find a way to return you in safety to your country."

"May the blessings of Allah be upon thee!" cried Zeyd.

And when they came at last to the village, Tarzan received the promise of the chief to keep Zeyd there in safety until Ibn Jad returned.

After he had left the village again, the ape-man headed north, for he was concerned over the report that Zeyd had given him of the presence of a European prisoner among the 'Aarab. That Stimbol, whom he had sent eastward toward the coast, should be so far north and west as Zeyd had reported appeared inconceivable, and so it seemed more probable that the prisoner was young Blake, for whom Tarzan had conceived a liking. Of course the prisoner might not be either Stimbol or Blake—but whoever he was, Tarzan could not readily brook the idea of a white man being permitted to remain a prisoner of the Bedouins.

But Tarzan was in no hurry, for Zeyd had told him that the prisoner was to be held for ransom. He would have a look about for Blake's camp first and then follow up the spoor of the Arabs. His progress, therefore, was leisurely. On the second day he met the apes of Toyat, and for two days he hunted with them, renewing his acquaintance with Gayat and Zutho, listening to the gossip of the tribe, often playing with the *balus*.

Leaving them, he loafed on through the jungle, stopping once for half a day to bait Numa where he lay upon a fresh kill, until the earth trembled to the thunderous roars of the maddened king of beasts as the ape-man taunted and annoyed him.

SLOUGHED was the thin veneer of civilization that was Lord Greystoke; back to the primitive—to the savage beast—the ape-man reverted, as naturally, as simply, as one changes from one suit to another. It was only in his beloved jungle, surrounded by its savage denizens, that Tarzan of the Apes was truly Tarzan, for always in the presence of civilized men there was a certain restraint that was the outcome of that inherent suspicion that creatures of the wild ever feel for man.

Tired of throwing ripe fruit at Numa, Tarzan swung away through the middle terraces of the forest, lay up for the night far away; and in the morning, scenting Bara the deer, made a kill and fed. Lazy, he slept again, until the breaking of twigs and the rustle of down-tramped grasses awoke him.

He sniffed the air with sensitive nostrils

and listened with ears that could hear an ant walk, and then he smiled. Tantor was coming!

For half a day Tarzan lolled on the huge back, listening to Manu the monkey chattering and scolding among the trees. Then he moved on again.

A DAY or two later Tarzan came upon a large band of monkeys. They seemed much excited, and at sight of him they all commenced to jabber and chatter.

"Greetings, Manu!" cried the ape-man. "I am Tarzan, Tarzan of the Apes. What happens in the jungle?"

"Gomangani! Gomangani!" cried one.

"Strange Gomangani!" cried another.

"Gomangani with thunder-sticks!" chattered a third.

"Where?" asked the ape-man.

"There! There!" they shouted in chorus, pointing toward the northeast.

"Many sleeps away?" asked Tarzan.

"Close! Close!" the monkeys answered.

"There is one Tarmangani with them?"

"No, only Gomangani. With their thunder-sticks they kill little Manu and eat him. Bad Gomangani!"

"Tarzan will talk with them," said the ape-man.

"They will kill Tarzan with their thunder-sticks and eat him," prophesied an old gray-beard.

The ape-man laughed and swung off through the trees in the direction Manu had indicated. He had not gone far when the scent-spoor of blacks came faintly to his nostrils, and this spoor he followed until presently he could hear their voices in the distance.

Silently, warily, Tarzan came through the trees, noiseless as the shadows that kept him company, until he stood upon a swaying limb directly above a camp of negroes.

Instantly Tarzan recognized the safari of the young American, Blake, and a second later he dropped to the ground before the astonished eyes of the blacks. Some of them would have run, but others recognized him.

"It is Big Bwana!" they cried. "It is Tarzan of the Apes!"

"Where is your head-man?" demanded Tarzan.

A stalwart negro approached him. "I am head-man," he said.

"Where is your master?"

"He is gone, many days," replied the black.

"Where?"

"We do not know. He hunted with a single *askar*. There was a great storm. Neither of them ever returned. We searched the jungle for them, but could not find them. We waited in camp where they were to have joined us. They did not come. We did not know what to do. We would not desert the young Bwana, who was kind to us; but we feared that he was dead. We have not provisions to last more than another moon. We decided to return home and tell our story to the friends of the young Bwana."

"You have done well," said Tarzan. "Have you seen a company of the desert people in the jungle?"

"We have not seen them," replied the head-man, "but while we were searching for the young Bwana, we saw where desert people had camped. It was a fresh camp."

"Where?"

The black pointed. "It was on the trail to the north Galla country in Abyssinia, and when they broke camp they went north."

"You may return to your villages," said Tarzan, "but first take those things which are the young Bwana's to his friends to keep for him, and send a runner to the home of Tarzan with this message: Send one hundred Waziri to Tarzan in the north Galla country. From the water-hole of the smooth, round rocks, follow the trail of the desert people."

"Yes, Big Bwana, it will be done," said the head-man.

"Repeat my message."

The black did as he was bidden.

"Good!" said Tarzan. "I go. Kill not Manu the monkey if you can find other food, for Manu is the cousin of Tarzan and of you."

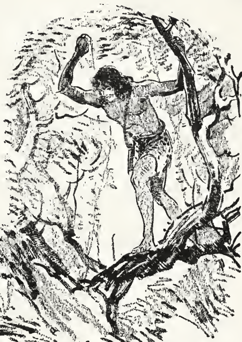
"We understand, Big Bwana."

IN the castle of Prince Gobred, in the City of Nímmr, James Hunter Blake was being schooled in the duties of a knight of Nímmr. Sir Richard had taken him under his protection and made himself responsible for his training and his conduct.

Prince Gobred, quick to realize Blake's utter ignorance of even the simplest observances of knighthood, was frankly skeptical, and Sir Malud was almost openly

antagonistic; but the loyal Sir Richard was a well-beloved knight, and so he had his way. Perhaps, too, the influence of the Princess Guinalda was not without its effect upon her sire, for first among the treasures of the Prince of Nímmr ranked his daughter Guinalda, and Guinalda's curiosity and interest had been excited by the romance of the coming of this fair stranger knight to the buried and forgotten City of Nímmr.

Sir Richard had clothed Blake from his own wardrobe until a weaver, a cutter of cloth, a seamstress and an armorer could fashion one for him. Nor did it take long. A week found Sir James clothed, armored and horsed as befitted a knight of Nímmr, and when he spoke to Sir Richard of payment for all this he found that money was almost unknown among them. There were, Sir Richard told him, a few pieces of coin that their ancestors had brought here seven hundred and thirty-six years before; but payment was made by service.



The earth trembled to the roars of Numa as the ape-man taunted him.

The knights served the prince, and he kept them. They protected the laborers and the artisans and in return received what they required from them. The slaves received their food and clothing from the prince or from whichever knight they served. Jewels and precious metals often changed hands in return for goods or service, but each transaction was a matter of individual barter as there were no standards of value.

They cared little for wealth. The knights valued most highly their honor and their courage, upon which there could be no price. The artisan found his reward in the high perfection of his handicraft and in the honors that it brought him.

The valley provided food in plenty for all; the slaves tilled the ground; the freemen were the artisans, the men-at-arms, the herders of cattle; the knights defended Nímmr against its enemies, contended against one another in tourneys, and hunted the wild game that abounded in the valley and its surrounding mountains.

AS the days passed, Blake found himself rapidly acquiring a certain proficiency in knightly arts under the wise tutelage of Sir Richard. The use of the sword and buckler he found most difficult, notwithstanding the fact that he had been proficient with the foils in his college days; for the knights of Nimmr knew naught of the defensive use of their two-edged weapons and seldom used the point for other purpose than the *coup de grace.* For them the sword was almost wholly a cutting weapon, the buckler their sole defense; but as Blake practiced with this weapon, it dawned upon him that his knowledge of fencing might be put to advantage should the necessity arise, to the end that his awkwardness with the buckler should be outweighed by his nicer defensive handling of his sword, and his offensive improved by the judicious use of the point, against which they had developed little or no defense.

The lance he found less difficult, its value being so largely dependent upon the horsemanship of him who wielded it, and that Blake was a splendid horseman was evidenced by his polo rating as an eight-goal man.

The ballium, or outer court, which lay between the inner and outer walls of the castle and entirely surrounded it, was, upon the north or valley side, given over entirely to knightly practice and training Here the ballium was very wide, and against the inner wall was built a wooden grandstand that could be quickly removed in the event of an attack upon the castle.

Jousts and tilts were held here weekly, while the great tourneys that occurred less often were given upon a field outside the castle wall.

Daily many knights and ladies came to watch the practice and training that filled the ballium with life and action and color during the morning hours. Good-natured banter flew back and forth; wagers were laid, and woe betide the contender who was unhorsed during these practice bouts, for the thing that a knight dreaded, even more than he dreaded death, was ridicule! For though in the formal jousts that were held weekly, greater decorum was observed by the audience, during the daily practice their raillery verged upon brutality.

It was before such an audience as this that Blake received his training, and because he was a novelty, the audiences were larger than was usual, and because the friends of Sir Malud and the friends of Sir Richard had tacitly acknowledged him as an issue, both the applause and the ridicule were loud and boisterous.

Even the Prince came often, and Guinalda always was there. It was soon apparent that Prince Gobred leaned slightly to the side of Sir Malud, with the natural result that Malud's party immediately acquired numerous recruits.

The training of the lads who were squires to the knights and who would one day be admitted to the charmed circle of knighthood occupied the earlier hours of the morning. This was followed by practice tilts between knights, during which Sir Richard or one of his friends undertook the training of Blake at the far side of the ballium, and it was during this practice that the American's outstanding horsemanship became apparent, even Gobred being led to applause.

" 'Ods bodikins," he exclaimed, "the man be a part of his charger!"

" 'Twas but chance that saved him from a fall," said Malud.

"Mayhap," agreed Gobred, "but at that melikes the look of him within a saddle."

"He doeth not too ill with his lance," admitted Malud, "but 'odsblud, didst ever see a more awkward lout with a buckler? Methinks he hath had more use for a trencher!" This sally elicited roars of laughter, but the Princess Guinalda did not join—a fact which Malud, whose eyes were often upon her, was quick to note. "Thou still believest this churl to be a knight, Princess Guinalda?" he demanded.

"Have I said aught?" she asked.

"Thou didst not laugh," he reminded her.

"He is a stranger knight, far from his own country, and it seemeth not a knightly nor a gentle thing to ridicule him," she replied. "Therefore I did not laugh, for I was not amused."

LATER that day as Blake joined the others in the great court, he ran directly into Malud's party; nor was it at all an accident, as he never made any effort to avoid Malud or his friends and was, seemingly, oblivious to their thinly veiled taunts and insinuations. Malud himself attributed this to the density and ignorance of a yokel, which he insisted Blake to be; but there were others who rather admired Blake for his attitude, see-

ing in it a studied affront that Malud was too dense to perceive.

Most of the inmates of the grim castle of Nímmr were inclined pleasantly toward the newcomer. He had brought with him an air of freshness and newness that was rather a relief from the hoary atmosphere that had surrounded Nímmr for nearly seven and a half centuries. He had brought them new words and new expressions and new views, which many of them were joyously adopting, and had it not been for the unreasoning antagonism of the influential Sir Malud, Blake had been accepted with open arms.

Sir Richard was far more popular than Malud, but lacked the latter's wealth in horses, arms and retainers, and consequently had less influence with Prince Gobred. However, there were many independent souls who either followed Sir Richard because they were fond of him, or arrived at their own decisions without reference to the dictates of policy, and most of these were stanch friends to Blake.

Not all of those who surrounded Malud this afternoon were antagonistic to the American, but the majority of them laughed when Malud laughed and frowned when he frowned, for in the courts of kings and princes flourished the first order of "yes men."

Blake was greeted by many a smile and nod as he advanced and bowed low before the Princess Guinalda, who was one of the company, and being of princely blood, entitled to his first *devoirs.*

"Thou didst well this morning, Sir James," said the Princess kindly. "It pleases me greatly to see thee ride."

"Methinks 'twould be a rarer treat to see him serve a side of venison," sneered Malud.

This provoked so much laughter that Malud was encouraged to seek further applause.

"Odzooks," he cried, "arm him with a trencher and carving-knife, and he would be at home!"

"Speaking of serving," said Blake, "as Sir Malud's mind seems to be more occupied with that than with more knightly things, does any of you know what is necessary quickly to serve fresh pig?"

"Nay, fair sir knight," said Guinalda, "we know not. Prithee tell us."

"Yes, tell us," roared Malud; "thou, indeed, shouldst know."

"You said a mouthful, old scout; I do know!"

"And what be necessary that thou mayst quickly serve fresh pig?" demanded Sir Malud, looking about and winking.

"A trencher, a carving-knife and you, Sir Malud," replied Blake.

IT was several seconds before the thrust penetrated their simple minds; it was the Princess Guinalda who first broke into merry laughter, and soon all were roaring, while some explained the quip to others.

No, not all were laughing—not Sir Malud! When he grasped the significance of Blake's witticism, he first turned very red and then went white, for the great Sir Malud liked not to be the butt of ridicule, which is ever the way of those most prone to turn ridicule upon others.

"Sirrah," he cried, "darest thou affront Malud? Odsblud, fellow! Lowborn varlet! Only thy blood canst atone this affront!"

"Hop to it, old thing," replied Blake. "Name your poison!"

"I know not the meaning of thy silly words," cried Malud, "but I know that an' thou dost not meet me in fair tilt upon the morrow I shall whip thee across the Valley of the Holy Sepulcher with a barrel-stave!"

"You're on!" snapped back Blake. "Tomorrow morning in the south ballium with—"

"Thou mayst choose the weapons, sirrah," said Malud.

"Don't call me sirrah; I don't like it," said Blake very quietly, and now he was not smiling. "I want to tell you something, Malud, that may be good for your soul. You are really the only man in Nímmr who didn't want to treat me well and give me a chance, a fair chance, to prove that I am all right.

"You think you are a great knight, but you are not. You have no intelligence, no heart, no chivalry. You are not what we would call in my country a good sport. You have a few horses and a few men-at-arms. That is all you have, for without them you would not have the favor of the Prince, and without his favor you would have no friends.

"You are not so good or great a man in any way as is Sir Richard, who combines all the qualities of chivalry that for centuries have glorified the order of knighthood; nor are you so good a man

as I, who, with your own weapons, will beat you tomorrow when, in the north ballium, I meet you on horseback with sword and buckler!"

The members of the party, upon seeing Malud's wrath, had gradually fallen away from Blake until, as he concluded his speech, he stood alone a few paces apart from Malud and those who surrounded him. Then it was that one stepped from among those at Malud's side and walked to Blake. It was the Princess Guinalda.

"Sir James," she said with a sweet smile, "thou spakest with thy mouth full!" She broke into a merry laugh. "Walk with me in the garden, sir knight!" And taking his arm, she guided him toward the south end of the eastern court.

"You're wonderful!" was all that Blake could find to say.

"Dost really think I be wonderful?" she demanded. "'Tis hard to know if men speak the truth to such as I. The truth, as people see it, is spoken more oft to slaves than princes."

"I hope to prove it by my conduct," said Blake seriously.

THEY had drawn a short distance away from the others now, and the girl suddenly laid her hand impulsively upon his arm.

"I brought thee away, Sir James, that I might speak with thee alone," she said.

"I do not care what the reason was, so long as you did it," he replied, smiling.

"Thou art a stranger among us, unaccustomed to our ways, unversed in knightly practice—so much so that there are many who doubt thy claims to knighthood. Yet thou art a brave man, or else a very simple one, or thou wouldst never have chosen to meet Sir Malud with sword and buckler, for he is skilled with these, while thou art clumsy with them.

"Because I think that thou goest to thy death tomorrow, I have brought thee aside to speak with thee."

"What can be done about it now?" asked Blake.

"Thou art passing fair with thy lance," she said, "and it is still not too late to change thy selection of weapons. I beg thee to do so."

"You care?" he asked.

The girl's eyes dropped for an instant and then flashed up to his, and there was a touch of hauteur in them. "I am the daughter of the Prince of Nímmr," she said. "I care for the humblest of my father's subjects."

"I guess that will hold you for a while, Sir James," thought Blake; but to the girl he said nothing, only smiled again.

Presently she stamped her foot. "Thou hast an impudent smile, sirrah!" she exclaimed angrily. "Of a truth, I like it not! And thou art too forward with the daughter of a prince."

"I merely asked you if you cared whether I was killed. Even a cat would ask that."

"And I replied. Why then didst thou smile?"

"Because your eyes had answered me before your lips had spoken and I knew that your eyes had told the truth."

Again she stamped her foot angrily. "Thou art indeed a forward boor," she exclaimed. "I shall not remain to be insulted further!"

Her head held high, she turned and walked haughtily away to rejoin the other party.

Blake stepped quickly after her. "Tomorrow," he whispered, "I meet Sir Malud with sword and buckler. With your favor upon my helmet I could overthrow the best sword in Nímmr."

The Princess Guinalda did not deign to acknowledge that she had heard his words as she walked on to join the others clustered about Sir Malud.

CHAPTER XII

"Tomorrow Thou Diest!"

IN the village of Batando the chief, there was a great celebration upon the night that Ulala returned. A goat was killed, and many chickens, and there were fruit and cassava bread and native beer in plenty for all. There was music, too, and dancing. With all of this it was morning before they sought their sleeping mats, with the result that it was after noon the following day before Fejjuân had an opportunity to speak of serious matters with Batando.

When finally he sought him out, he found the old chief squatting in the shade before his hut, slightly the worse for the orgy of the preceding night.

"I have come to talk with you, Batando," he said, "of the desert people."

Batando grunted. His head ached.

"Yesterday you said that you would

"We saw where desert people had camped." And the black pointed. "It was on the trail to the Galla country."

lead them to the entrance to the Forbidden Valley," said Fejjuân. "You mean, then, that you will not fight them?"

"We shall not have to fight them if we lead them to the entrance to the Forbidden Valley," replied Batando.

"You speak in riddles," said Fejjuân.

"Listen, Ulala," replied the old chief. "In childhood you were stolen from your people and taken from your country. Being young, there were many things you did not know, and there are others that you have forgotten.

"It is not difficult to enter the Forbidden Valley, especially from the north. Every Galla knows how to find the northern pass through the mountains or the tunnel beyond the great cross that marks the southern entrance. There are only these two ways in—every Galla knows them; but every Galla also knows that there is no way out of the Forbidden Valley."

"What do you mean, Batando?" demanded Fejjuân. "If there are two ways in, there must be two ways out."

"No—there is no way out," insisted the chief. "As far back as goes the memory of man or the tales of our fathers and our fathers' fathers, it is known that many men have entered the Forbidden Valley; but no man has ever come out of it."

"And why have they not come out?"

Batando shook his head. "Who knows?" he asked. "We cannot even guess what their fate is."

"What sort of people inhabit the valley?" asked Fejjuân.

"Not even that is known. No man has seen them and returned to tell. Some say they are the spirits of the dead, others that the valley is peopled by leopards; but no one knows.

"Go therefore, Ulala, and tell the chief of the desert people that we will lead him to the entrance to the valley. If we do this, we shall not have to fight him and his people; nor shall we ever again be bothered by them." And Batando laughed grimly at his little joke.

"Will you send guides back with me to lead the Bedaùwy to the Valley?" asked Fejjuân.

"No," replied the chief. "Tell them we shall come in three days. In the meantime I shall gather together many warriors from other villages, for I do not trust the desert people. Thus we shall conduct them through our country. Explain this to their chief, and also that in payment he must release to us all the Galla slaves he has with him—before he enters the Valley."

"That Ibn Jad will not do," said Fejjuân.

"Perhaps, when he sees himself surrounded by Galla warriors, he will be glad to do even more," replied Batando.

And so Fejjuân, the Galla slave, returned to his masters and reported all that Batando had told him to report.

IBN JAD at first refused to give up his slaves, but when Fejjuân had convinced him that under no other terms would Batando lead him to the entrance to the valley, and that his refusal to liberate the slaves would invite the hostile attentions of the Gallas, he finally consented; but in the back of his mind was the thought that before his promise was consummated, he might find an opportunity to evade it.

Only one regret had Fejjuân in betraying the Bedaùwy, and that was caused by his liking for Ateja; but being a fatalist, he was consoled by the conviction that whatever was to be, would be, regardless of what he might do.

And as Ibn Jad waited, and Batando gathered his black warriors from far and near, Tarzan of the Apes came to the water-hole of the smooth round rocks, and took up the trail of the Bedouins.

Since he had learned from Blake's black that the young American was missing, and also that they had seen nothing of Stimbol since the latter had separated from Blake and started for the coast, the ape-man was more convinced than ever that the white prisoner among the Arabs was Blake.

Still he felt no great concern for the man's safety, for if the Bedouins had sufficient hopes of reward to spare his life at all, he was in no great danger from them. Reasoning thus, Tarzan made no pretense of speed as he followed the spoor of Ibn Jad and his people.

TWO men sat upon rough benches at opposite sides of a rude table. Between them a cresset of oil with a cotton wick lying in it burned feebly, slightly illuminating the stone flagging of the floor and casting weird shadows of themselves upon the rough stone walls.

Through a narrow window, innocent of glass, the night air blew, driving the flame of the cresset now this way, now that. Upon the table between the men lay a square board blocked off into squares, and upon some of these were wooden pieces.

"It is your move, Richard," said one of the men. "You don't appear to be very keen about the game tonight. What's the matter?"

"I be thinking of the morrow, James, and my heart be heavy within me," replied the other.

"And why?" demanded Blake.

"Malud is not the best swordsman in Nímmr," replied Sir Richard, "but—" He hesitated.

"I am the worst," Blake finished the sentence for him, laughingly.

Sir Richard looked up and smiled. "Thou wilt always joke, even in the face of death," he said. "Art all the men of this strange country thou tell'st of alike?"

"It is your move, Richard," said Blake.

"Hide not his sword from thine eyes with thy buckler, James," cautioned Richard. "Ever keep thine eyes upon his eyes until thou knowest whereat he striketh, then, with thy buckler ready, thou mayst intercept the blow, for he be overslow, and always his eyes proclaim where his blade will fall. Full well I know that, for often have I exercised against him."

"And he hasn't killed you," Blake reminded him.

"Ah, we did but practice; but on the morrow it will be different, for Malud engages thee to the death, in mortal combat, my friend, to wash away in blood the affront thou didst put upon him."

"He wants to kill me, just for that?" asked Blake. "I'll tell the world he's a touchy little rascal!"

"Were it only that, he might be satisfied merely to draw blood; but there is more that he hath against thee."

"More? What? I've scarcely spoken to him a dozen times," said Blake.

"He be jealous."

"Jealous? Of whom?"

"He would wed the Princess, and he hath seen in what manner thou lookest at her," explained Richard.

"Poppycock!" cried Blake, but he flushed.

"Nay, he be not the only one who hath marked it," insisted Richard.

"You're crazy," snapped Blake.

"Often men look thus at the Princess, for she be beautiful beyond compare, but—"

"Has he killed them all?" demanded the American.

"Nay, for the Princess did not look back at *them* in the same manner."

The Princess Guinalda walked to Blake. "Sir James," she said, "thou spakest with thy mouth full!"

Blake leaned back upon his bench and laughed outright. "Now I know you're crazy," he cried, "—all of you. I'll admit that I think the Princess is a mighty sweet kid; but say, young fellow, she can't see me a little bit."

"Enough of thy outlandish speech I grasp to gather thy meaning, James, but thou canst not confuse me upon the one subject nor deceive me upon the other. The eyes of the Princess seldom leave thee whilst thou art at practice upon the lists, and the look in thine when they rest upon her—hast ever seen a hound adoring his master?"

"Run along and sell your papers," admonished Blake.

"For this Sir Malud would put thee out of the way, and it is because I know this that I grieve, for I have learned to like thee over-well, my friend."

Blake arose and came around the end of the table. "You're a good old scout, Richard," he said, placing a hand affectionately upon the other's shoulder. "But do not worry—I am not dead yet. I know I seem awkward with the sword, but I have learned much about its possibilities within the past few days, and I think that Sir Malud has a surprise awaiting him."

"Thy courage and thy vast assurance should carry thee far, James, but they may not overcome a lifetime of practice with the sword, and that is just the advantage that Malud hath over thee."

"Does Prince Gobred favor Malud's suit?" demanded Blake.

"Why not? Malud is a powerful knight, with a great castle of his own and many horses and retainers. Besides a dozen knights, he hath fully an hundred men-at-arms."

"There are several knights who have their own castles and following, are there not?" asked Blake.

"Twenty, perchance," replied Richard.

"And they live close to Gobred's castle?"

"At the edge of the hills, within three leagues upon either hand of Gobred's castle," explained Richard.

"And no others live in all this great valley?" demanded Blake.

"You have heard mention made of Bohun?" asked Richard.

"Yes, often—why?"

"He calls himself king, but never will we refer to him as king. He and his followers dwell upon the opposite side of the valley. They number, perchance, as many as we, and we be always at war against them."

"But I've been hearing quite a bit about a great tournament for which the knights are practicing now. I thought that Bohun and his knights were to take part in it."

"They be. Once each year, commencing upon the first Sunday of Lent and extending over a period of three days, there hath been from time immemorial a truce declared between the Fronters and

the Backers, during which is held the Great Tourney, one year in the plain before the City of Nímmr, and the next year in the plain before the City of the Sepulcher, as they call it."

"Fronters and Backers!" What in heck do those mean?" demanded Blake.

"Thou art a knight of Nímmr and know not that?" exclaimed Richard.

"What I know about knighting would rattle around in a peanut shell," admitted Blake.

"Thou shouldst know this, and I shall tell thee. Hark thee well, then," said Richard, "for I must need go back to the beginning."

HE poured two goblets of wine from a flagon standing on the floor beside him, took a long drink and proceeded with his tale. "Richard I sailed from Sicily in the spring of 1191 with all his great following, bound for Acre, where he was to meet the French king, Philip Augustus, and wrest the Holy Land from the power of the Saracen. But Richard tarried upon the way to conquer Cyprus and punish the vile despot who had placed an insult upon Berengaria, whom Richard was to wed.

"When the great company again set their sails for Acre, there were many Cyprian maidens hidden away upon the ships by knights who had taken a fancy to their lovely faces, and it so befell that two of these ships, encountering a storm, were blown from their course and wrecked upon the Afric shore.

"One of these companies was commanded by a knight yclept Bohun, and the other by one Gobred; and though they marched together, they kept separate other than when attacked by an enemy.

"Thus, searching for Jerusalem, they came upon this valley, which the followers of Bohun declared was the Valley of the Holy Sepulcher and that the crusade was over. Their crosses, that they had worn upon their breasts as do all crusaders who have not reached their goal, they removed and placed upon their backs, to signify that the crusade was over and that they were returning home.

"Gobred insisted that this was not the Valley of the Holy Sepulcher and that the crusade was not accomplished. He, therefore, and all his followers, retained their crosses upon their breasts and built a city and a strong castle to defend the entrance to the valley, that Bohun and his followers might be prevented from returning to England until they had accomplished their mission.

"Bohun crossed the valley and built a city and a castle to prevent Gobred from pushing on in the direction in which the latter knew that the true Sepulcher lay; and for nearly seven and a half centuries the descendants of Bohun have prevented the descendants of Gobred from pushing on and rescuing the Holy Land from the Saracen, while the descendants of Gobred have prevented the descendants of Bohun from returning to England, to the dishonor of knighthood.

"Gobred took the title of prince and Bohun that of king, and these titles have been handed down from father to son during the centuries, while the followers of Gobred still wear the cross upon their breasts and are called, therefrom, the Fronters; and the followers of Bohun wear theirs upon their backs and are called Backers."

"And you would still push on and liberate the Holy Land?" asked Blake.

"Yes," replied Sir Richard, "and the Backers would return to England; but long since have we realized the futility of either hope, since we be surrounded by a vast army of Saracens, and our numbers be too few to pit against them.

"Thinkest thou not that we are wise to remain here under such stress?" he demanded.

"Well, you'd certainly surprise 'em if you rode into Jerusalem, or London, either," admitted Blake. "On the whole, Richard, I'd remain right here, if I were you. You see, after seven hundred and thirty-six years, most of the home folks may have forgotten you, and even the Saracens might not know what it was all about if you came charging into Jerusalem."

"Mayhap you speak wisely, James," said Richard; "and then too, we be content here, knowing no other country."

FOR a while both men were silent, in thought. Blake was the first to speak. "This big tourney interests me," he said. "You say it starts the first Sunday in Lent. That's not far away."

"No, not far. Why?"

"I was wondering if you thought I'd be in shape to have a part in it. I'm getting better with the lance every day."

Sir Richard looked sadly at him and shook his head. "Tomorrow thou wilt be dead," he said.

"Say! You're a cheerful party," exclaimed Blake.

"I am only truthful, good friend," replied Richard. "It grieveth my heart sorely that it should be true, but true it be—thou canst not prevail over Sir Malud on the morrow. Would that I might take thy place in the lists against him, but that may not be. But I console myself with the thought that thou wilt comport thyself courageously and die as a good sir knight should, with no stain upon thy escutcheon. Greatly will it solace the Princess Guinalda to know that thou didst die thus."

"You think so?" ventured Blake.

"Verily."

"And if I don't die—will she be put out?"

"Put out! Put out of what?" demanded Richard.

"Will she be sore vexed, then," corrected Blake.

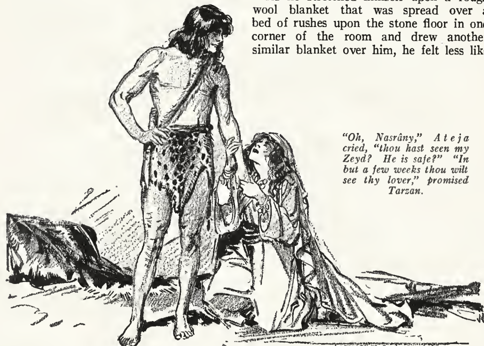
"I should not go so far as to say that," admitted Richard; "but natheless it appears certain that no lady would rejoice to see her promised husband overthrown and killed; and if thou art not slain, it may only be because thou hast slain Malud."

"She is his affianced wife?" demanded Blake.

" 'Tis understood, that be all. As yet no formal marriage banns have been proclaimed."

"I'm going to turn in," snapped Blake then. "If I've got to be killed tomorrow, I ought to get a little sleep tonight."

As he stretched himself upon a rough wool blanket that was spread over a bed of rushes upon the stone floor in one corner of the room and drew another similar blanket over him, he felt less like sleep than he had ever felt before. The knowledge that on the morrow he was to meet a medieval knight in mortal combat naturally gave him considerable concern, but Blake was too self-reliant and too young seriously to harbor the belief that he would be the one to be killed. He knew it was possible, but he did not intend to permit the thought to upset him. There was, however, another that did. It upset him very much, and too, it made him angry when he realized that he was concerned about it—about the proposed marriage of Sir Malud of West Castle, and of Guinalda, Princess of Nimmr.



"Oh, Nasrâny," Ateja cried, "thou hast seen my Zeyd? He is safe?" "In but a few weeks thou wilt see thy lover," promised Tarzan.

Could it be that he had been ass enough, he soliloquized, to have fallen in love with this little medieval princess who probably looked upon him as dirt beneath her feet? And what was he going to do about Malud? Suppose he should get the better

of the fellow on the morrow? Well, what about it? If he killed him, that would make Guinalda unhappy. If he didn't kill him—what? Sir James did not know.

CHAPTER XIII

In the Beyt of Zeyd

THREE days Ibn Jad waited in his *menzil*, but no Galla arrived to lead him into the valley as Batando had promised, and so he sent Fejjuân once more to the chief to urge him to hasten, for always in the mind of Ibn Jad was the fear of Tarzan of the Apes, and the thought that he might return to thwart and punish him.

He knew he was out of Tarzan's country now, but he also knew that where boundaries were so vague he could not definitely count upon this fact as an assurance of safety from reprisal. His one hope was that Tarzan was awaiting his return through Tarzan's country, and this Ibn Jad had definitely decided not to attempt. Instead he was planning upon moving directly west, passing north of the ape-man's stamping grounds, until he picked up the trail to the north, down which he had traveled from the desert country.

In the *mukaad* of the Sheik with Ibn Jad sat Tollog, his brother, and Fahd and Stimbol, besides some other 'Aarab. They were speaking of Batando's delay in sending guides, and they were fearful of treachery, for it had long been apparent to them that the old chief was gathering a great army of warriors, and though Fejjuân assured them that they would not be used against the 'Aarab if Ibn Jad resorted to no treachery, yet they were all apprehensive of danger.

Ateja, employed with the duties of the harem, did not sing or smile as had been her wont, for her heart was heavy with mourning for her lover. She heard the talk in the *mukaad*, but it did not interest her. Seldom did her eyes glance above the curtain that separated the women's quarters from the *mukaad*, and when they did, the fires of hatred blazed within them as they crossed the countenance of Fahd.

She chanced to be thus glancing when she saw Fahd's eyes, which were directed outward across the *menzil*, go suddenly wide with astonishment. "*Billah*, Ibn Jad!" cried the man. "Look!"

With the others Ateja turned her glance in the direction Fahd was staring, and with the others she voiced a little gasp of astonishment, though those of the men were rounded into oaths.

Walking straight across the *menzil* toward the Sheik's *beyt* there strode a bronzed giant armed with a spear, arrows and a knife. Upon his back was suspended an oval shield, and across one shoulder and his breast was coiled a rope, hand-plaited from long fibers.

"Tarzan of the Apes!" ejaculated Ibn Jad. "The curse of Ullah be upon him!"

"He must have brought his black warriors with him and left them hidden in the forest," whispered Tollog. "Not else would he dare enter the *menzil* of the Beduw."

Ibn Jad was heart-sick, and he was thinking fast when the ape-man halted directly in the outer opening of the *mukaad*. Tarzan let his eyes run quickly over the assemblage. They stopped upon Stimbol, finally.

"Where is Blake?" he demanded of the American.

"You ought to know," growled Stimbol.

"Have you seen him since you and he separated?"

"No."

"You are sure of that?" insisted the ape-man.

"Of course I am."

Tarzan turned to Ibn Jad. "Thou hast lied to me. Thou art not here to trade, but to find and sack a city; to take its treasure and steal its women."

"That is a lie!" cried Ibn Jad. "Whoever told thee that, lied."

"I do not think he lied," replied Tarzan. "He seemed an honest youth."

"Who was he?" demanded Ibn Jad.

"His name is Zeyd." Ateja heard, and was suddenly galvanized to new interest. "He says all this and more, and I believe him."

"What else did he tell thee, Nasrâny?"

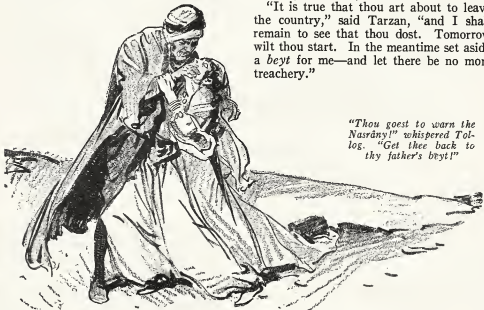
"That another stole his musket and sought to slay thee, Ibn Jad, and then put the blame upon him."

"That is a lie, like all he hath told thee!" cried Fahd.

IBN JAD sat in thought, his brows contracted in a dark scowl, but presently he looked up at Tarzan with a crooked smile. "Doubtless the poor youth thought that he spoke the truth," he said, "just

as he thought that he should slay his sheik and for the same reason. Always hath his brain been sick, but never before did I think him dangerous.

"He hath deceived thee, Tarzan of the Apes, and that I can prove by all my people as well as by this Nasrâny I have befriended, for all will tell thee that I am



"Thou goest to warn the Nasrâny!" whispered Tollog. "Get thee back to thy father's beyt!"

seeking to obey thee and leave thy country. Why else then should I have traveled north back in the direction of my own *beled?"*

"If thou wished to obey me, why didst thou hold me prisoner and send thy brother to slay me in the night?" asked Tarzan.

"Again thou wrongest Ibn Jad," said the Sheik sadly. "My brother came to cut thy bonds and set thee free, but thou set upon him, and then came *el-fîl* and carried thee away."

"And what meant thy brother when he raised his knife and cried: 'Die, Nasrâny!'?" demanded the ape-man. "Sayeth a man thus who cometh to do a kindness?"

"I did but joke," mumbled Tollog.

"I am here again," said Tarzan, "but not to joke. My Waziri are coming. Together we shall see thee well on thy way toward the desert."

"It is what we wish," said the Sheik quickly. "Ask this other Nasrâny if it be not true that we are lost and would be but too glad to have thee lead us upon the right way. Here we be beset by Galla warriors. Their chief hath been gathering them for days, and momentarily we fear that we shall be attacked. Is that not true, Nasrâny?" He turned to Stimbol as he spoke.

"Yes, it is true," said Stimbol.

"It is true that thou art about to leave the country," said Tarzan, "and I shall remain to see that thou dost. Tomorrow wilt thou start. In the meantime set aside a *beyt* for me—and let there be no more treachery."

"Thou needst fear nothing," Ibn Jad assured him, then he turned his face toward the women's quarters. "Hirfa! Ateja!" he called. "Make ready the *beyt* of Zeyd for the sheik of the jungle."

AT one side, but at no great distance from the *beyt* of Ibn Jad, the two women raised the black tent for Tarzan, and when the *am'dàn* had been placed and straightened and the *tunb el-beyt* made fast to the pegs that Ateja drove into the earth, Hirfa returned to her household duties, leaving her daughter to stretch the side curtains.

The instant that Hirfa was out of earshot, Ateja ran to Tarzan.

"Oh, Nasrâny," she cried, "thou hast seen my Zeyd? He is safe?"

"I left him in a village where the chief will care for him until such time as thy people come upon thy return to the desert country. He is quite safe and well."

"Tell me of him, O Nasrâny, for my heart hungers for word of him," implored

the girl. "How camest thou upon him? Where was he?"

"His mare had been dragged down by El-adrea, who was about to devour thy lover. I chanced to be there and slew El-adrea. Then I took Zeyd to the village of a chief who is my friend, for I knew that he could not survive the perils of the jungle should I leave him afoot and alone. It was my thought to send him from the country in safety, but he begged to remain until thou returnest that way. This I have permitted. In a few weeks thou wilt see thy lover."

Tears were falling from Ateja's long, black lashes—tears of joy—as she seized Tarzan's hand and kissed it. "My life is thine, Nasrâny," she cried, "for that thou hast given me back my lover."

THAT night as the Galla slave Fejjuân walked through the *menzil* of his masters, he saw Ibn Jad and Tollog sitting in the Sheik's *mukaad* whispering together; and Fejjuân, well aware of the inherent turpitude of this precious pair, wondered what might be the nature of their plotting.

Behind the curtain of the harem Ateja lay huddled upon her sleeping mat, but she did not sleep. Instead she was listening to the whispered conversation of her father and her uncle.

"He must be put out of the way," Ibn Jad insisted.

"But his Waziri are coming," objected Tollog. "If they do not find him here, what can we say? They will not believe us, whatever we say. They will set upon us. I have heard that they are terrible men."

"By Ullah!" cried Ibn Jad. "If he stays, we are undone. Better risk something than to return empty-handed to our own country after all that we have passed through."

"If thou thinkest that I shall again take this business upon myself, thou art mistaken, brother," said Tollog. "Once was enough."

"No, not thee; but we must find a way. Is there none among us who might wish more than another to be rid of the Nasrâny?" asked Ibn Jad, but to himself as though he were thinking aloud.

"The other Nasrâny!" exclaimed Tollog. "He hateth him."

Ibn Jad clapped his hands together. "Thou hast it, brother!"

"But still shall we be held responsible," reminded Tollog.

"What matter if he be out of the way? We can be no worse off than we now are. Suppose Batando came tomorrow with the guides? Then indeed would the jungle sheik know that we have lied to him and it might go hard with us. No, we must be rid of him this very night."

"Yes, but how?" asked Tollog.

"Hold! I have a plan. Listen well, O brother!" And Ibn Jad rubbed his palms together and smiled; but he would not have smiled, perhaps, had he known that Ateja listened, or had he seen the silent figure crouching in the dark just beyond the outer curtain of his *beyt*.

"Speak, Ibn Jad," urged Tollog. "Tell me thy plan."

"It is known by all that the Nasrâny Stimbol hates the sheik of the jungle. With loud tongue he hath proclaimed it many times before all when many were gathered in my *mukaad*."

"You would send Stimbol to slay Tarzan of the Apes?"

"Thou hast guessed aright," admitted Ibn Jad.

"But how wilt that relieve us of responsibility? He will have been slain by thy order in thine own *menzil*," objected Tollog.

"Wait! I shall not command the one Nasrâny to slay the other; I shall but suggest it and when it is done I shall be filled with rage and horror that this murder hath been done in my *menzil*. And to prove my good faith I shall order that the murderer be put to death in punishment for his crime. Thus we shall be rid of two unbelieving dogs and at the same time be able to convince the Waziri that we were indeed the friends of their sheik, for we shall mourn him with loud lamentations—when the Waziri shall have arrived."

"Allah be praised for such a brother!" exclaimed Tollog, enraptured.

"Go thou now, at once, and summon the Nasrâny Stimbol," directed Ibn Jad. "Send him to me alone and after I have spoken with him and he hath departed upon his errand, return thou to my *beyt*."

ATEJA trembled upon her sleeping mat, while the silent figure crouching outside the sheik's tent arose after Tollog had departed and disappeared in the darkness of the night

Hastily summoned from the *beyt* of Fahd, Stimbol, cautioned to stealth by Tollog, moved silently through the darkness to the *mukaad* of the Sheik, where he found Ibn Jad awaiting him.

"Sit, Nasrâny," invited the Bedouin.

"What in hell do you want of me this time of night?" demanded Stimbol.

"I have been talking with Tarzan of the Apes," said Ibn Jad, "and because thou art my friend and he is not, I have sent for thee to tell thee what he plans for thee. He has interfered in all my designs and is driving me from the country, but that is as nothing compared with what he intends for thee."

"What in hell is he up to now?" demanded Stimbol. "He's always butting into some one else's business."

"Thou dost not like him?" asked Ibn Jad.

"Why should I?" And Stimbol applied a vile epithet to Tarzan.

"Thou wilt like him less when I tell thee," said Ibn Jad.

"Well, tell me."

"He says that thou hast slain thy companion Blake," exclaimed the Sheik, "and for that Tarzan is going to kill thee on the morrow."

"Eh? What? Kill me?" demanded Stimbol. "Why he can't do it! What does he think he is—a Roman emperor?"

"Nevertheless he will do as he says," insisted Ibn Jad. "He is all-powerful here. No one questions the acts of this great jungle sheik. Tomorrow he will kill thee."

"But—you wont let him, Ibn Jad! Surely, you wont let him?" Stimbol was already trembling with terror.

IBN JAD elevated his palms. "What can I do?" he asked.

"You can—you can—why, there must be something that you can do," wailed the frightened man.

"There is naught that any can do—save yourself," whispered the Sheik.

"What do you mean?"

"He lies asleep in yon *beyt* and—thou hast a sharp *khûsa*."

"I have never killed a man," whimpered Stimbol.

"Nor hast thou ever been killed," reminded the Sheik; "but tonight thou must kill, or tomorrow thou wilt be killed."

"God!" gasped Stimbol.

"It is late," said Ibn Jad, "and I go to my sleeping mat. I have warned thee—do what thou wilt in the matter." And he arose as though in dismissal.

STIMBOL, trembling, staggered out into the night. For a moment he hesitated, then he crouched and crept silently through the darkness toward the *beyt* that had been erected for the ape-man.

But ahead of him ran Ateja to warn the man who had saved her lover from the fangs of El-adrea. She was almost at the *beyt* she had helped to erect for the ape-man, when a figure stepped from another tent, and clapping a palm across her mouth and an arm about her waist held her firmly.

"Where goest thou?" whispered a voice in her ear, a voice that she recognized at once as belonging to her uncle; but Tollog did not wait for a reply—he answered for her. "Thou goest to warn the Nasrâny because he befriended thy lover! Get thee back to thy father's *beyt*. If he knew this, he would slay thee. Go!" And he gave her a great shove in the direction from which she had come.

There was a nasty smile upon Tollog's lips as he thought how neatly he had foiled the girl, and he thanked Allah that chance had placed him in a position to intercept her before she had been able to ruin them all; and even as Tollog, the brother of the Sheik, smiled thus, a hand reached out of the darkness behind him and seized him by the throat—and he was dragged away. . . . .

Trembling, bathed in cold sweat, grasping in tightly clenched fingers the hilt of a keen knife, Wilbur Stimbol crept through the darkness toward the tent of his victim.

Stimbol had been an irritable man, a bully and a coward; but he was no criminal. Every fiber of his being revolted at the thing he contemplated. He did not want to kill, but he was a cornered human rat, and he thought that death stared him in the face, leaving open only this one way of escape.

As he entered the *beyt* of the ape-man, he steeled himself to accomplish that for which he had come, and he was indeed a very dangerous, a very formidable man as he crept to the side of the figure lying in the darkness, wrapped in an old burnous.

Exciting events follow each other in swift succession in the next installment of Tarzan—in our forthcoming March issue.

Soft Living and Shipwreck

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Grigsby the civil engineer encounters one of his most interesting adventures in this notably individual story by the distinguished author of "Free Lances in Diplomacy."

Illustrated by Ben Cohen

THE first section of the Mid-Western Limited was making its regular "sixty" over the Pueblo Springs Division, the general manager's private car trailing at the end. Silas K. Denmore and John Grigsby were sitting on the observation platform at the rear, while the "G. M." pointed out occasional traces of sabotage along the right-of-way.

"There are difficulties enough in railway management without the bolshevist feature, John. When I saw the thing getting noticeable, I knew I'd got to step on it right at the start. Our men are a loyal, decent lot as a rule—well paid and well treated. I put it up to them squarely—showed them how soon the road and their meal-tickets would be on the toboggan if the propaganda began to have any real effect, and told them I wanted any man caught talking that sort of stuff brought up on the carpet before me as soon as they nabbed him. Within a week, they rounded up a dozen—whom I promptly fired with a pretty straight warning that they'd get hurt if caught on our right-of-way. Well, inside of a month, I found I'd started something. They tried to get me twice by shooting from ambush—and our division detectives shot three of them tampering with the block signals. With every new batch of men we take on, there's usually at least one 'red'—who gets warned and fired. The A. F. L. are squarely behind me; they've a pretty good idea of what Russia is like today and don't want anything of that sort here. The 'reds' may damage us some before we're through, but they wont get control of this road while I'm alive or after I've left these parts. Conkling is next in line if anything happens to me—and Millikin, after him. Both are railroad men from head to foot."

"You've put some of your own money in the road, haven't you?" inquired Grigsby.

"Practically all of it, though it wouldn't be even pin-money in Wall Street. I haven't been able to put by very much—too busy railroading—and the road's too

poor to pay big salaries. But I've no family except a daughter and her children —they'll get nearly everything I leave. There's a boy of my dead sister's that I think a lot of—I've put him in the Massachusetts Tech, where they're making an engineer of him. I've left enough to see him through the course and give him about sixty-five a month after he gets through. That ought to mean a reasonably good start and keep him from starving to death, anyhow. Anything beyond that, he'll have to earn. —What the dev—"

Denmore sprang from his camp-chair and leaned over the brass railing to look up ahead. Grigsby noticed the slowing down of the car's motion at the same moment, and was leaning out on the other side. As they looked up ahead where the locomotive ought to have been, they saw the last car of the train disappearing in a cloud of dust. Either the coupling had parted—a negligible supposition—or somebody had deliberately disconnected the signal-cord and thrown over the uncoupling-bar when nobody was looking. Their car was gradually slowing down.

"Hell! The second section isn't four minutes behind us!"

"Then beat it for the front end of the car—quick! This end will be telescoped!"

They ran through to the other end, hauling the negro porter, Clem, along with them. There Grigsby and the porter took the chance of swinging off, as the car was then moving less than ten miles an hour—supposing, of course, that the "G. M." would follow them. He hung off the lower step, waiting for a bit slower motion. A matter of thirty seconds probably would have saved him even at the cost of a few bruises—but the train following struck the car before he jumped and plowed halfway through it, throwing Denmore under the forward truck, which took off both his legs before the wreck turned over with the locomotive, in the ditch.

DESPITE their bruises, Grigsby and the porter ran to Denmore. Hastily making tourniquets of a sheet which Clem hauled through a smashed window, they managed to stanch the flow of blood. Then they commandeered an automobile on the turnpike, which paralleled the tracks at that point, and had Denmore in a good hospital within forty minutes from the time the car was struck. He had not lost consciousness for a moment and before they moved him from under the wreck, had directed Clem to place a guard around the car and get out all of his papers or personal luggage which hadn't been destroyed. This the faithful porter succeeded in doing, and fetched them to the hospital within a few hours.

As soon as his friend was in the hands of the doctors, Grigsby put through a long distance call to his home.

"John talking, Joan! I was riding with Silas K. on the Pueblo Springs Division. Bolshevist wreck. Porter and I got a few bruises — nothing worth mentioning — but poor old Denmore had both legs cut off. Doctors think he may recover, but I'm not so sure! Go over to Philadelphia and see his daughter Phœbe Williams. It'd take you two days and a half to get here unless you came by plane. If there's no use coming—I'll bring him home to her. If there's any chance of seeing him alive, I'll arrange by wire for a plane for you two."

As Grigsby was returning to the room where Denmore had been taken, the interne stopped him outside the door to whisper:

"He's insisting upon going through the papers his porter rescued from the private car. Even in spite of your prompt measures, the poor chap has lost a lot of blood and had a smashing shock. He looks to be sixty or a bit over—and while his heart seems pretty good, railway men don't have much mercy on their motors, and it may stop on him, just now, with the least over-exertion. Can't you side-track him on those papers?"

When Grigsby sat down by the bedside, the "G. M." grinned cheerfully. But there was a strange pallor in his face.

"Can't I go through the papers for you, old chap?" asked Grigsby gently. "A mere word or two will indicate about what you want done—I can ask questions if necessary."

Denmore thought this over a moment or two.

"If you'll do that, John, it will probably enable me to clean up the slate and leave everything shipshape. If I tackle it myself, I may go out before I finish. Quite some detail about handling these 'reds'—and that's got to go on whether we run all our trains or not. New construction and repairs, also—had them at my finger-ends—"

"The job will keep for a day or two—wont it?"

"Suppose I pass out before it's 'tended

to? I guess we might as well face it, John—there's a feeling inside of me as if the wheels were making their last few turns.

"Er—before we go at these papers—one or two things: The Bankers' Trust Company has my will and power-of-attorney for the safe-deposit boxes. And—could you occasionally keep an eye on Tom Brainard—over in the Tech? I think the boy's sound timber—good blood on both sides—but sometimes inclined to follow the line of least resistance—kinda looking for the soft side of things. If he has any major weakness, that's the one. I've just now scribbled a couple of lines, telling him to go to you for advice when he needs it—am I asking too much? No? Thanks!"

FOR the next hour, the engineer systematically went through the mass of papers, laying aside what he saw were merely routine matters, but sorting out those requiring information as to what Denmore had in mind concerning them. The interne, the specialist and the nurse sat at the other end of the room, but stepped over occasionally to see the effect upon the patient.

Finally the patient reached out weakly to grasp his friend's hand, the whimsical smile again deepening the lines about his mouth.

"Life doesn't owe me anything, John," he said slowly. "I've played the game. Been everywhere—seen everything—done everything. The idea of eternal rest isn't unpleasant."

There were a few moments of silence. Then the voice from the pillows added faintly: "Old Omar had the right idea:

> There was a door to which I found no key:
> There was a veil past which I could not see:
> Some little talk, awhile, of Me and Thee
> There seemed—and then—no more of Thee and Me."

AT the burial, Grigsby took young Brainard aside and slipped Denmore's last note into his hand.

Tom thanked him mechanically; but as time went on and the young fellow made no move toward hunting him up, the engineer wrote a couple of his old classmates, who now were of the Faculty, asking them to keep him advised as to how Brainard was shaping up, and the sort of fellows he picked for his intimates

Matters drifted on in this way until Tom was rounding out his Junior year. At the spring "prom," Brainard and the girl he had brought in from Wellesley were standing with a small group when one of the Seniors called their attention to a distinguished-looking man and a handsome woman chatting with the president and his wife.

"By Jove! See that couple chinning with Prexy? That's what a possible one or two of you men may be coming to, if you always carry Haswell in one pocket and keep up the everlasting grind! Know who they are? John Grigsby and his wife—who built the big Feng Hsu irrigation project and licked that tough gang of French Colonial grafters! He's one of the big men in the profession. They say his wife is pretty much the same sort of person—she goes everywhere with him. Mighty fine-looking couple, I'll say!"

Something stirred in Brainard's memory until it focused upon a long-forgotten note. For the first time, it occurred to him that he had been remiss in courtesy. He drew the girl's hand through his arm and taking her to the little group around the president, he bowed, saying:

"I came over to present an apology, Mr. Grigsby. You've doubtless forgotten me entirely—but I want to thank you most sincerely for your kindness after my uncle's death. I am—"

But the engineer smilingly interrupted him.

"We haven't forgotten you, Tom! Mrs. Grigsby and I are much pleased that you remember us, after but one brief meeting. We figured that you were doing some rather intensive work, here, and would come to us for a day or two when you had the time for it. Isn't this Mona Ronayne—Philip Ronayne's daughter? I've known and worked with your father a good many years, Mona, but I haven't seen you since just before your mother died—all of eight years."

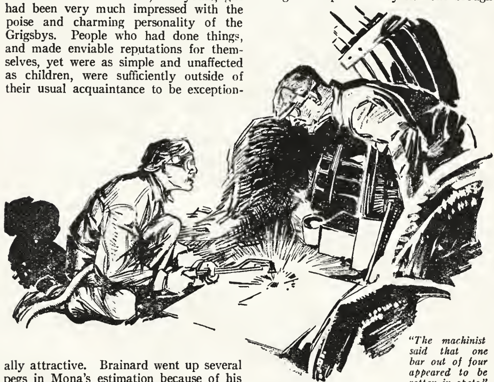
Young Brainard's clean-cut appearance and courteous demeanor reminded Grigsby of what the uncle had said about good blood on both sides. Generations of decent, courteous folk among one's forebears do leave a certain heritage—the strain keeps cropping out for a long time even with pretty slimy mixtures afterward. And Tom's acquaintance with Mona Ronayne was a factor which presented all sorts of possibilities. Her father was a

millionaire contractor whose firm had offices in several cities—the sort of man whose everyday business depended upon the engineering profession as much as any other factor. The young people had met each other in quite the usual way, at a Wellesley "Prom." And the two seats of learning were near enough for them to see each other once or twice a week.

Like Tom's classmates, the young girl had been very much impressed with the poise and charming personality of the Grigsbys. People who had done things, and made enviable reputations for themselves, yet were as simple and unaffected as children, were sufficiently outside of their usual acquaintance to be exceptionally attractive. Brainard went up several pegs in Mona's estimation because of his evident friendly standing with them—and that the engineer should have recognized her before any introductions had been made naturally added her to his many admirers.

On the Grigsbys' side, there was considerably more far-sighted speculation concerning the girl. They asked the president if he had any definite information relating to her.

"Well—some," he replied. "The Dean, over there, was a classmate of my wife's. Of course it's impossible to make an exhaustive study of every girl in a place like Wellesley—any more than we could do it here with these boys—but Mona has rather interested her from the first day they met. The girl has had money simply thrown at her since Ronayne's wife died; and that was one of the influences hardest to combat in college. It took a year to show her that while she had unlimited cash to fling about upon anything which took her fancy, it was extremely bad taste to do it among girls who took jobs as waitresses in summer hotels to pay their way through the four-year course—to shower gifts upon chums who couldn't possibly return them and were being made parasites by it. She brought



"The machinist said that one bar out of four appeared to be rotten in spots."

her own car and chauffeur when she first came up, but the Dean nipped that right at the start—told her she could go home or elsewhere in her car if she wished, but couldn't keep it anywhere around the college. She said that some of the other girls did it—and was told that those girls would soon be dropped unless they cut it out.

"We've considered doing the same thing here—the roadhouse parties are getting to be a disgrace to all the colleges—but it's a difficult problem to handle in a city.

"However, the Dean says that basically Mona appears to be sound—like her father—and sees a point very quickly. Very fond of dancing, theaters and house-parties, but is showing occasional self-control even along those lines."

"Any particular ambition, or taste for some sort of a career?"

"Don't think so. Pretty much everything the girl tackles, she does very well—and lets it go at that. Seems to go in for all-round development, which is both unusual and creditable—but she ridicules the idea that she may not always have plenty of money to spend, and has no sort of use for a life of struggle. Not the slightest inclination toward settlement-work—wont even discuss it with the girls who are fitting themselves for that sort of thing."

Before the Grigsbys went home they invited Brainard for a fortnight's visit with them at their apartment in the Tudor Campanile on Fort Washington Heights, during his next vacation.

DURING Brainard's senior year, he spent the Christmas holidays with the Grigsbys in Bermuda, and wrote to them occasionally. A few weeks before graduation, he made a long-distance call to find out whether they were disengaged for the evening.

They knew that something pressing must have prompted his flying visit, but they tactfully avoided questions until Brainard got around to what he had in mind. Until after dinner, however, there was no indication that it was anything but a social call. As they left the table, Joan felt that a self-starter was needed.

"Tom, you've said nothing to us about your plans after leaving the Tech. I'm wondering if you were thinking of going over something of the sort with John? Yes? Well, you two go into his den where you can smoke if you want to. If you need me for arbitration, just wig-wag."

Brainard gave her a grateful look and mumbled something in an embarrassed way that she took for thanks. In the den, he proceeded to unburden himself.

"You see, sir, my position is about like this: Uncle Silas had been giving me an allowance of a hundred and fifty a month to cover all my expenses outside of tuition. The executor has continued that up to graduation—after which, I get an annuity running to sixty-five a month. After Uncle's death, I knew exactly where I stood and what I had coming to me—no chance for anything more unless I earned it. Of course, some of the men I go with have big allowances and spend a lot, but I cut my expenses as low as I decently could—got a little job in Boston requiring two hours' work a day, which pays me twelve a week. Altogether, I've saved nearly three hundred. But—well—you see—I'm going to get married in August, and it isn't nearly enough—"

"Going to get married! Without a job?"

"Oh, I'll have a job all right—got that cinched within a week after I graduate—one of the subways, here—thirty-five a week for a starter and fifty as soon as I've got the hang of it. But I'll have to pay board and lodging while I work—buy some clothes—wont be able to save more than ten a week if I do that, with living-expenses what they are. Now my wedding, ushers and trip will cost me several hundred dollars. I've figured until I'm dizzy, trying to cut the cost as low as I decently can without making my fiancée ashamed of me, but I think that's about the minimum. You told me to come to you for advice when I needed it—and this is one case where I sure do! You know old Gilbert, the executor, pretty well, and I was hoping you could persuade him to let me have five or six hundred out of the annuity to get me over this snag."

GRIGSBY shook his head. "Gilbert couldn't do it if he would. Your uncle had some such contingency as this in mind and tied the money up so you get it in sixty-five dollar chunks *only*. I'm glad he did! How the devil are you going to support a wife—pay for her clothes and spending-money—to say nothing of household expenses, rent, and your own clothes and lunches—on thirty-five a week?"

"Oh, that'll be easier than it looks! My future father-in-law says he had hard enough scratching when he was first married—he means to see that his daughter has an easier time of it. We're going to live with him until my salary is doubled—then take an apartment in one of the decent neighborhoods—about six or seven rooms."

"Any idea what that will cost you?"

"Yes, we've looked at several. We can get something that's respectable for twenty-four hundred—with two guest-rooms. My fiancée has some money of her own—much more than we'll need over and above what I earn."

"Why not go over to Flatbush—where you can get the same space for half the money?"

"That's out of the question! Mona's always lived in New York. You know what New Yorkers think of Brooklyn!"

"I know that Flatbush is the best residence-section there is left in the greater city! Only reason I took an apartment in the Tudor Campanile was because I built it and it's good business for me to live here—but we were more comfortable in Flatbush. There's a square mile over there full of more congenial people than there are on Washington Heights. So it's Mona Ronayne, is it? Looked as if matters were drifting that way a year ago. Well, Tom, my first reaction to your bombshell is—I'm sorry!"

An expression of angry and hurt amazement came into the young fellow's face.

"Sorry!" he exclaimed. "Why—why I thought you liked Mona! She thinks a lot of you and Mrs. Grigsby!"

"We both think a lot of her, Tom—I've liked her ever since she was a kid. But she's had so much money to spend ever since then that she has no more idea what it means to earn a dollar than a hen has As you said, her father doesn't mean that she ever shall have the scratchy time he did in his younger days—entirely forgetting the fact that going through that scratchy time made him what he is today! American parents are simply demented when it comes to indulging their children—particularly in the case of a mother with an only boy or a widower with an only daughter! It makes no difference whatever how much money the wife herself has, or can earn—that has nothing to do with the husband's side of it. Every man who marries is supposed to support his wife and children by his own efforts; if he lives beyond his means, everybody sets him down as a weak fool and a failure. However, all that is aside from the personal slant which, apparently, you've missed. One of the greatest pleasures your uncle had was in giving you the best obtainable technical education—he thought of you as being, in later life, one of America's foremost engineers. Of course he's gone, now—there's no possible chance of his ever knowing how you do pan out. But he'd certainly be bitterly disappointed at any such start in life as you've outlined."

"I don't see why, Mr. Grigsby! I don't see that at all!"

"Well, let's just go into it a bit. Of course, Ronayne got you the Subway job."

"Yes—but I don't see how you could have guessed that!"

"You couldn't have gone out and landed any such job yourself—immediately after graduation. But Ronayne, Ennis and Company have enough political influence all over the country to fill a dozen such jobs when they want to—and he'd like to keep his daughter in New York, instead of having her several thousand miles from home. Mona wants you, and he's making it easy for her to have you without waiting, as most young folks have to. All right! What's the job—chain-and-level work?"

"Better than that—section superintendent."

"That's bad again—because you'll have to pass on the work of cub engineers under you without having had the practical experience to be dead sure they're right. A mistake in 'math' while you're in college is merely a matter of so many demerits. But the same mistake on actual construction may mean actual loss of life sooner or later—you've got to know what you're doing, in the field, by personal experience. Suppose something of that sort does come up and you're severely censured by your superiors. If you'd landed the job yourself, you'd be fired for incompetency. In your case, it would be merely censure—because you're a protégé of Philip Ronayne, who stands pretty well with the city government. Can't you see where that puts you professionally, Tom?"

"I don't think I get what you mean."

"Instead of being a junior engineer—independent—standing on your own technical knowledge, you're nothing but a parasite—a 'yes man' for Ronayne! Suppose Ronayne goes to smash in a Wall Street panic? What would happen to *you?*"

"Well, I'd have the job, wouldn't I?"

"Not forty-eight hours—with Ronayne either ruined or dead! Don't forget that it's a political job. After you've been in your twenty-four-hundred-dollar flat three or four years, the Subway construction is finished. What then?"

YOUNG Brainard smiled confidently. "I should worry! Mr. Ronayne particularly mentioned that point. He said he'd see that I had a berth somewhere around the city as long as he lived."

"If he lives thirty years—the best, hard-working years of your life—you'll be, at the end of them, exactly where you're starting, now—a parasite—with never a chance to develop or to take responsibility—do big things. I thought you had some ambition to become an engineer, Tom?"

"I have! That's what I looked forward to even in high-school. And it seemed to me that this offer of Mr. Ronayne's was rather exceptional luck—a chance to start right in at practical engineering and get married at the same time—"

"And does it still look that way to you?"

"Why, I—I don't just know. You've shown me a lot of points, sir, which hadn't occurred to me at all. With what you've been through professionally, I guess you must be right. But—"

"All right, boy. That's all I wanted you to admit—if you'll promise not to forget what I've said! Now let's consider your immediate situation. I couldn't stop you from going through with what you've started if I talked all night. When two young people make up their minds to marry, any sort of interference is simply useless. So I'm going to help you out—upon a certain definite understanding. I'll lend you six hundred dollars, if you think that will cover what you need. Perhaps we'd better make it eight hundred—then you needn't spend it all unless you really have to. You should be able to pay me back in five years—but if it takes a bit longer than that, I wont kick. I'm doing this chiefly because of that twelve-dollar job you got and the three hundred you saved. With what you had, and the temptations to blow in every cent, I consider those even more creditable accomplishments than your high standing in study.

"As for the conditions I mentioned—if you go ahead as you've outlined things to me, you're heading for several kinds of trouble sooner or later. Now I want your promise that no matter what the trouble is, or how discouraging, you will come to us *before* the explosion occurs—as long before as possible—and seriously consider what we tell you about getting out of it. Will you do that, Tom?"

For a moment Brainard had some difficulty in managing his voice. This unexpected kindness, when he had begun to think his journey utterly futile, was almost too much for his composure.

"I—I think you may depend upon my doing that, sir! I'd be a damned fool not to. And—and I'm ready to postpone my wedding for a while if you think best."

"I'm afraid you'll lose Mona if you do—with your plans all laid out as they are. You see, I know something about her temperament. Seems to me you'll make just about the right sort of husband for her—

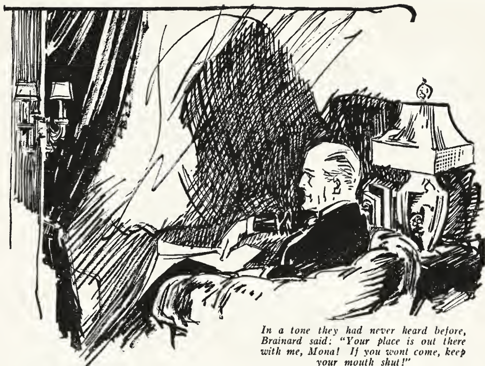
and when she gets her eyes open to the realities of life, if she ever does, she ought to make a pretty fine wife for *you.* You're bound to go through considerable hell in getting adjusted—but if you stick—that's the point—if you *stick*—you'll be worth the whole world to each other after the cyclone has cleared away! Another thing, Brainard—confidentially, you understand: Watch your step on the new job! Ronayne's company is one of the contractors, you know."

BRAINARD went back on the "owl" express, and saw Mona Ronayne next evening at Wellesley, where there happened to be a dance to which he had been invited. He was noticeably preoccupied—so much so that the other girls found him rather tiresome. When he managed to get Mona out where they could talk for half an hour, he gave her the gist of his discussion with Grigsby.

Her first reaction was one of hurt indignation.

"*Well!* I think the man might have minded his own business!" she remarked. "If that's the kind he is, we'd better have nothing more to do with him!"

"Wait a bit, Mona," Tom checked her. "You're overlooking one or two points! He thinks we're making a mistake by starting in as we plan—but in spite of that,



In a tone they had never heard before, Brainard said: "Your place is out there with me, Mona! If you wont come, keep your mouth shut!"

he handed me a check out of his own pocket for more money than I think I'll need, after explaining that Gilbert couldn't advance me anything. And when I asked him if he thought I'd better postpone getting married right away, he said I'd probably lose you if I did—and thought you'd make a fine wife for me—"

"Did he, Tom? Honest, did he really say that? It sounds as if he's pretty nice after all! Probably just the old-fashioned notions elderly men have about early marriages!" (Grigsby is still in his thirties.)

Brainard was firm upon one point—he wouldn't have a splurge wedding in church, regardless of Ronayne's determination to have his only daughter in all the rotogravure supplements for a week or so. The older man and his prospective son-in-law had a private talk during which the latter gave his discussion with Grigsby as closely as he could remember it; this opened Ronayne's eyes to a possibility that the boy might not be altogether the parasite he had supposed.

"I think you'll admit, sir, that Mr. Grigsby was about right in everything he said. I'd had no experience in actual business life—had entirely overlooked the points he made. My first impulse was to postpone our marriage indefinitely—but the thought of losing Mona if she got tired of waiting was too much for me. So I'm going ahead as we planned—but I'm not going to throw away one cent that doesn't seem necessary to spend. I'm going in for all the experience I can get in the job you've so kindly obtained for me—when that's finished, I'll see what I can get for myself without anybody's help. Can't you see the position it puts me in—a young fellow without a cent in the world beyond his small salary, to have a big church wedding that he, personally, couldn't pay for in ten years—if it was up to him to do it? Let's be married quietly in your house with as limited an invitation-list as you can get up without giving offense. Isn't that the only sensible thing to do?"

Ronayne sat studying him from under his shaggy eyebrows for a moment or two.

"Young man," he said then, "I shouldn't wonder if Mona picked a better son-in-law for me than I thought! I'm not sure whether I ought to let Mona marry you or not—that girl's just about everything in the world to me, you know. And when she takes the bit in her teeth, she'll give any man a run for his money. More like me than her mother in that way. When you two get settled down by yourselves, there'll be ructions—if I've got you sized up right this time. And I don't know which might be the worse for her in the long run—a tame cat, or a real back-fence scrapper! H-m-m—I guess I'll play 'em as they lay,

Tom. You're honest—and you've got more sense than I thought."

IN the glamour of the first few months after the honeymoon, Brainard thought his general status a very pleasant one. With his wife's wide circle of acquaintances and his own college friends, they found themselves in a whirl of festivities and entertainment—something doing every night until rather late hours.

At first, he made a point of getting on the job when the men were supposed to start work—about seven. And the cub engineers under him thought it best to be there when he arrived. But one morning, it was nine when he turned up—and after ten, when his two assistants came in. He said nothing—but they started in on him, defensively:

"Aw, cut it out, Brainard! You had to have a pull to get this job, same as we did—and as long as you've got that pull, nobody's going to fire you, see! We aint going to break our necks getting down here at seven any longer. We've got to get our sleep!"

That evening, Brainard insisted upon going home at midnight, to his wife's amazement. He also stipulated that there should be at least two nights out of every week when they remained at home without company—it being necessary for him to have that much time for professional work of one sort or another.

Mona agreed to this. But after the second week, friends began dropping in upon them unexpectedly—and of course it would have been awkward to turn them out. However, her husband merely fixed up one of their two guest-rooms as his private den and retired to that, no matter who called. When their friends tried to bully him out of it, he simply locked the door. Mona took up the matter with her father, expecting that he would laugh at any necessity for Tom's working so hard—and got the biggest surprise of her life.

"Look here, girl! Tom's got sense enough to try to get some of the home life he married you for. Now I'll tell you what you're going to do! You and Tom are going to have those two evenings a week at home *alone*—and you're going to fix it so's nobody butts in! If you don't, I'll cut down your allowance—a whole lot! Get that?"

Brainard's next jolt was from his wife's up-stage chauffeur. Mona had urged her husband to use her car at any time she was not out in it—but Curran didn't enjoy taking him. The trips were apt to have for their objective some bit of construction several miles away, and Tom saw no reason why he should tip the man, who was liberally paid. Soon excuses began to multiply. There was a puncture in a rear shoe—gas was too low in the tank—a missing spark-plug—or the car had to be overhauled for something.

One night, when the car would have saved him time and money, Tom told Curran excuses didn't go—he'd have the car ready in half an hour or hunt another job. The man stared at him insolently.

"Aw—is that so! Say, Bo, how do you get that way? I aint drawin' no wages from you, am I?"

They looked at each other a moment.

"All right!" snapped Tom. "I catch your point. You needn't bring the car, but you'll have a taxi here in ten minutes or lose your job! Get busy!"

In the course of a week, it dawned upon Mona that her husband was not using the car at all. She asked Curran why and he mumbled something about there being a little misunderstanding with Mr. Brainard. Then she went to Tom—and got exactly what Curran had said.

"Why, of all the beastly impudence I ever heard! I'll discharge him at once, Tom!"

"Yes, I think you'd better. It was rank disobedience of your orders to him. On the other hand—he told the truth. I'm *not* paying his wages. Sooner or later, other chauffeurs who are too lazy for the trips I take will try to get away with the same thing. You'll be constantly firing them without getting anywhere. So, when I can't use the Sub, I'll take a taxi."

"Why then, perhaps I'd better give up the car altogether!"

"No—it's only one of several features in our false position. Going without it would be so great an inconvenience that you'd be upset a lot. The fact is, we started wrong, girl—and we've got to just muddle through as best we can until I'm making a lot more money."

TO a girl brought up as Mona had been without the faintest idea of what it means to go without something one very much wants until she has earned the money to pay for it, most of the little things which kept cropping up seemed merely trivial.

She had plenty of money to pay for the various expenditures she suggested—for taking a more expensive apartment and launching out into a more lavish way of living. She was proud of her handsome, attractive husband, and naturally was eager to show him off. But she found his pride a stubborn thing. She might fling her own money as she chose—that was something he had nothing to say about. When it came to living in a way that everybody would know to be ridiculously beyond his means, however, he objected. Sooner or later, of course, such little differences were bound to start a tiny rift—which grew instead of healing over. At the end of the second year, relations between them were becoming strained.

Then a situation developed on his job which seemed to cut the ground from under Brainard's feet. He simply couldn't figure out a way to handle it. Before taking any definite action, he went to see Grigsby.

"This morning, when I got down in the cut, one of the machinists was drilling holes in steel channel-bars which we rivet in pairs for the supporting posts. When his drill was halfway through the metal, a piece the size of a dollar broke through at one side. I took the lever and set the drill on a chalk-mark further down—good clean hole. A second one was ragged around the edges. A third chipped out a piece two inches in diameter. The machinist said that one bar out of four in that particular lot appeared to be just as rotten in spots. I told him to lay them aside by themselves until I decided what to do with them. My first impulse, naturally, was to go to the chief of our section—"

"Exactly! But that steel was supplied under contract by Ronayne's company. Ronayne practically retired three years ago when they took in two junior partners with additional capital—and the business is running today on his reputation for square dealing. Crooked work by his company reflects upon him—though he knows nothing at all about it. If you go to the chief engineer of that section—appointed under a political pull—he'll probably tell you those channel-bars aren't bad enough to be discarded as long as they are riveted to sound ones. If you still kick, he'll say you'd better take that up with your father-in-law—which gets Ronayne into the courts in a pretty nasty way before you're through. The Chief would know you'd hesitate about that, but you've shown yourself not safe to have around a political job. So they'll frame you good and plenty—hurt your professional reputation for years—make the story follow wherever you go. All right! Anything else, before we consider the question?"

"Yes—a lot! But one instance gives a line on the whole proposition. A couple of hundred laborers get down on the job and there's no material on hand for 'em to work with. I go to the Chief—ask him if they can be used on some other section while they're waiting, or whether I'd better let 'em go for the day. He says material was promised long ago and is probably on the way; likely to get there any minute—better hold 'em. The material doesn't come—or comes in driblets which don't keep half of 'em busy. We're wasting simply *weeks* of labor at one time or another! Of course I didn't go to the Chief a second time. Saw what I was up against!"

"All that labor being paid for by the city, eh? Jobs for the faithful! If plenty of material kept coming, the jobs wouldn't last as long—eh? If it were a commercial job, what would you do, Tom? Suppose you were an engineer, taking the usual responsibility."

"Do? By gravy, I'd have material on the job or bust somebody wide open! Let the men go if I couldn't keep 'em busy!"

"Then why isn't the solution of your whole problem the getting of a commercial job instead of the one you have? They'll frame you or Ronayne before long in spite of anything you can do—if you stay! If you quietly get out now—giving no reason beyond your receiving a better offer—none of that political gang will do or say a thing. They've got too much at stake to make a lot of smoke needlessly. Mind you—every real man hates a quitter; and an engineer is supposed to finish anything he starts. But in a subordinate position like yours, where he's simply being made a monkey of, he gets a heap more respect by throwing down his hand and calling for a fresh deal."

BRAINARD sat leaning against his friend's desk for several minutes before he spoke. He had matured noticeably in the two years since graduation—there was the poise of one who has known and accepted responsibility.

"In the first place, with the frightful expense I'm under, I can't afford to be

idle a single day. If I resign, it'll tell against me in getting another job—they'll ask why I quit, with nothing else in view, and of course I can't answer that question. That's even more against me. Aside from all that, I'll have an explosion to face at home. If I knew where I could really land another job within a week—"

"I think I can probably get a berth for you on a mountain railroad in Yunnan, China, as principal assistant. Our good friend the Touchan of that district—Wu-Pei-Foh—is one of the most far-sighted men in the country, and one of the best educated. The revolutionists haven't meddled with him at all because he has a mighty well-drilled force of his own people—and he means to maintain just that strategic position. Anything which insures quicker and safer communication with Hongkong is decidedly in his favor. So he's decided to build a first-class broad-gauge single line from the head of navigation on the Hung-Shwi or upper branch of the West River, up to his capital in the hills—eighty miles, allowing for grades and curves. His last letter didn't indicate that he had decided upon his engineers as yet—if not, my recommendation would cinch the job. You're a better engineer than you were two years ago, Tom—I think I could trust you out there under some first-class man like Billy Frayne, for example. The Touchan will pay you five thousand if I say you're worth it. If I cable him now, I'll have the answer by nine in the morning; I could call you up on the job, and let you know. How about it? Will you go out there if the job is open, and start a professional reputation for yourself?"

Again, Brainard was lost in thought for a moment or two.

"Guess it would mean the wind-up with Mona, Mr. Grigsby. She wouldn't go with me to a place like that in a thousand years! Somebody would tell her the roads are simply impossible for a decent car—that even Hongkong society isn't anything she'd care about—" There was a bitter tone in the young fellow's voice.

"Well, if you're right as to that—which I somewhat doubt—you don't want her, do you?" responded Grigsby with a keen glance.

"*Want* her? It seems as if I just can't give her up! But matters can't go on this way between us. We're really on the rocks right now! If you can get me that job, sir—I'll go! That's a promise—with more appreciation of your kindness than I know how to express. I'll resign as soon as I hear from you in the morning, and I'll be on my way to the Coast inside of forty-eight hours."

"That's fine, Tom—that's man's talk! And—I've a hunch that you may find a wife waiting for you when you come back. In these days, no man with any sense attempts to say what a young woman will or wont do—but I believe that girl is sound at heart and will show a streak of pretty good stuff once she gets hep to the sort of life she's been living."

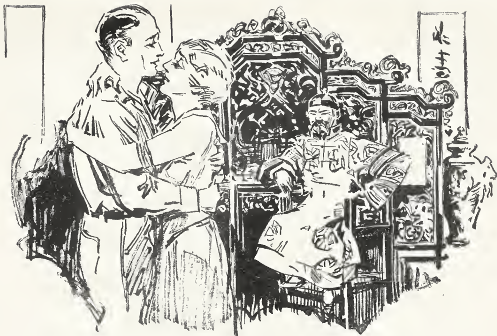
Brainard went to his section chief and resigned at ten o'clock next morning—after that gentleman had admitted that no other formality was necessary. The Chief telephoned the offices of Ronayne, Ennis & Company, within five minutes, to have them appoint a substitute engineer. There were excellent underground reasons why the superintendent of any section upon which they had a contract should be at least approved by them. Ennis' nephew, one of the junior partners, immediately called up Ronayne.

Ronayne called Brainard's apartment and was told that he was at home, packing to go West. When Tom came to the phone, he said he hadn't time to call upon his father-in-law but would be glad to see him there, if he could come. The elder man was there in half an hour.

WITH entire frankness, Brainard described half a dozen things he'd been up against, where any decided protest would be a reflection upon Ronayne's company, and told Ronayne where he could see the pile of rotten channel-bars if he cared to go look at them. Tom made it clear, however, that he considered his father-in-law absolutely innocent of what had been going on.

Mona came in during the discussion—angrier than either of them ever had seen her. Why couldn't Tom have stood pat for a week or two—if he had to be such a fool as to leave a good job—until her father could get him a better one in the city, she stormed. Why had he been insane enough to accept a berth in such a horrible, barbarous place as China—where they were having revolutions and massacres right now! Why hadn't he considered the position it would put her in!

Brainard's nerves finally refused to



For several moments Tom quite forgot the courtesy due his host.

stand the strain any longer. Quietly, but in a tone they never had heard before, he said:

"Your place is out there with me, Mona! If you come along, it stops any gossip—leaves nothing to say! I'm an engineer, accepting a better job with a chance for some reputation. If you wont come—keep your mouth shut!" Speechless, she turned to her father for sympathy. But Ronayne calmly lighted a cigar, saying:

"Tom is absolutely right, my girl! And you've been wrong from the start, though I guess it's nine-tenths my fault. His resignation has saved me from personal scandal and disgrace—if I can act quickly enough. His going out to a five thousand-dollar job in China is something no man but a fool would turn down in these circumstances. Your place is with him—learning what life means. I've hoped I might play with a few grandchildren before I die—it's time you had something of that sort in mind."

The door slammed as the girl whirled into her own room, raging. And she let Brainard go without another word.

The Grigsbys went to the Coast with him and by the time his steamer sailed, had succeeded in heartening him up to a point where he half believed that his marriage might not prove a total wreck in the long run. It was understood among Mona's acquaintances that she was going out to Hongkong presently, to furnish a home where her husband might come every month or so. She had privately decided to join one of the round-the-world cruises at San Francisco and stay for a year in Europe, until people had forgotten Tom's sudden departure—but, to her amazement, there seemed to be a sort of adventurous halo about the idea of her living in such a place as Hongkong. Also, Mona had to readjust her impressions as to an engineer's status—a *real* engineer, who did things in impossible, unheard-of places and then came home to be made much of!

GRIGSBY'S estimate of the girl wasn't so far out, after all. The rupture with Tom had been a stunning upheaval of all her preconceived ideas. She knew—or thought she knew—that he had never stopped loving her. Yet he had been strong enough to follow, however reluctantly, the trail he knew to be the right one, leaving behind all that he cared most for.

Gravely Mona began taking stock of herself—asking where all the wasteful jazz life had gotten them? Though mistress of her own luxurious home for two years, she'd forgotten everything learned of cooking and housekeeping at college. Not knowing how to run her house, she was obliged to overlook the constant graft-

ing and impudence of servants if she managed to keep them at all. Having had no restful home life with her husband—no evenings of that companionship which is priceless—she found that she had been living with a stranger whom she only saw occasionally, and that in the presence of others, as a rule. The real Tom she now tried hard to visualize.

After three months of this, Joan Grigsby invited father and daughter to dine with them one evening, and took the girl off to her own room while the men were smoking. After showing her photographs of the Feng Hsu district where they had built the big dam and irrigation-system —not more than sixty miles from where Brainard was then surveying for the Touchan's railway—and a lot of Hongkong pictures—she said meaningly:

"If we can start by tomorrow night—before some capitalist grabs John for big construction that he'll hate to turn down —there's nothing to prevent our running out to the Orient for two or three months and going up to Feng Hsu. We want to see the men who worked with us—three of them are still out there, in charge. And we've a personal reason for a little visit with our dear friend Wu-Pei-Foh—for whom Tom is working. Is there really any good reason why you and your father can't join us? He has retired from business—withdrawn his money and his name from the old company. I'm sure John easily can persuade him to go. How about you, Mona? Come along! You'll enjoy every minute of it. And really you ought to be proud of Tom!"

The girl's head drooped lower; she sank down upon the floor and hid her face upon Joan's lap.

NEARLY six weeks later, Brainard—who, with Billy Frayne, was comfortably lodged in the Touchan's rambling but lovely palace when they were near enough along the right-of-way to reach it with motor-bikes—came wearily into his room after a strenuous day. He shaved and had donned fresh clothing when he noticed a woman's coral sweater on his bed and a suitcase in a corner.

He stared incredulously—recognized them—and dashed out in a frantic search through the palace.

In the Touchan's gorgeous living-room, he found that delightful Asiatic, in one of his ceremonial costumes, smilingly having tea and rice-cakes with an obviously healthy and most bewitching Mona. And for several moments Tom quite forgot the courtesy due his host and employer.

After a while—when Tom learned that the Grigsbys had gone over to Feng Hsu for a few days—he took her out into the Touchan's beautiful garden, a score of acres in size and so massed with foliage that one might wander through its paths for hours without getting a glimpse of the surrounding town with its clustering houses and teeming population. The foothills of the Himalayas loomed up in rather awesome grandeur at the one side. The palace and its compound were just within the highest, uphill end of the garden, commanding a fifty-mile view to the eastward.

Following a certain path, Tom and Mona presently came into a tiny glade surrounded by dwarf cypresses against taller Asiatic firs. Climbing-roses were trained over the intervals between the cypresses. Against this background was a gleaming white marble stone beautifully carved in Chinese motifs. At the top was lettered the name:

FRANCIS J. GRIGSBY

Under this appeared three Chinese ideographs of an involved celestial meaning—perhaps the most beautiful idea which can be expressed in the language.

Tom removed his helmet as he pointed this out to Mona.

"He was born in the Headquarters shack over at Feng Hsu—only lived a minute or two. The ordeal nearly killed Joan. But John wanted her so much that she managed to pull through for his sake. They came half around the world to see that little grave—which the Touchan always keeps as you see it. It took courage to go through anything like that—out here!"

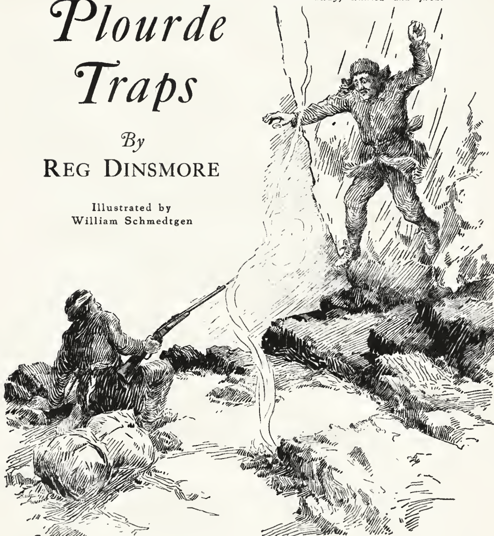
The girl gazed long at the little memorial. Then, leaning against her husband's shoulder, his strong arm about her, she murmured:

"I wonder if we ever could be everything to each other—as they are? Let's try, Tom. I'm beginning to realize more what life means than ever I dreamed of, back home! The Touchan has asked me to stay here as his guest until your work is done—he means it, too. I wonder what *we* can make of life—after a bad start?"

Plourde Traps

By
REG DINSMORE

Illustrated by
William Schmedtgen



As he swung himself out and dropped, Plourde, a scant ten feet away, whirled and fired.

A professional guide and trapper here sets down a curious drama of wilderness life—a story that you will find distinctly out of the ordinary.

LABORIOUSLY Vic McKenney plodded along a narrow trail that skirted the rocky face of a steep bluff. Fifty feet below, the Mistassini roared in a half-mile rapid, flinging on high white pennants of tortured spray. Glancing up the slope, McKenney suddenly froze in his tracks. Slowly, carefully, he eased the heavy pack from shoulders. With great caution he raised his rifle.

Thirty feet above him, close against the base of a great boulder, squatted a grouse. McKenney wanted that grouse; to him the bird meant meat for supper, when he reached his overnight "lean-to," five miles along his wilderness trap line.

The bead of McKenney's fore-sight swung up and covered the head of the bird. The trapper's finger crooked on the trigger in a careful squeeze, the sharp report of the rifle bit into the dull roar of the rapids, and—the boulder, toppling forward, hurled itself straight at him!

The sheer surprise of the thing almost cost the trapper his life. For a split second he saw those tons of granite leaping at him, hurtling through the air toward him. Then his wiry muscles tensed, and with the speed of a striking lynx he hurled himself aside.

With a crunching boom the boulder smashed into the trail at the exact spot where he had stood, ricocheted wildly, and followed by a shower of smaller stones it had dislodged, plunged beneath the surface of the racing water below.

McKenney, a strange feeling at the pit of his stomach, watched the hungry waters close over the falling rocks; then with a peculiar grimness to the set of his square jaw, he climbed to where lay the neatly decapitated grouse.

"Huh!" he grunted as he picked up the bird and thrust his fingers deep into its feathers. "Cold! Cold as a stone—been dead a day or two. Another trap, eh? Plourde, ye swarthy devil, ye mighty nigh got me that time!"

THE grouse had been but a bait. Directly behind the dead bird a thin sliver of stone had been propped beneath the boulder, supporting its weight. Then the great stone had been undermined, until all that was needed to start it on its downward course of destruction was the shattering impact of the bullet from McKenney's high-powered rifle.

From the top of the bluff, where the open rock-mass met the edge of the dense spruce growth, a mocking laugh drifted down. The trapper whirled and threw his rifle to his shoulder. His eyes searched the rim of the bluff.

Again came that jeering laugh, a single, derisive flirt of a dark hand from behind the sheltering bole of a spruce, and once more the ***chanson*** of the rapids held uninterrupted sway over the wilderness.

Gloomy and depressed, Vic McKenney retrieved his mangled pack from the trail and tramped on toward his lean-to. Too well he knew the absurdity of trying to come to grips with the half-breed. Experience had taught the trapper that the man would not fight in the open. Possessed of all the woods-cunning of a timber wolf, Plourde chose to harass the white trapper with weird death-traps, ingenious devices of a warped mind, a mind so highly trained in woodcraft that the outwitting of the sly otter, the canny fox, the elusive mink, were but matters of everyday occurrence.

That night, as McKenney watched the sparks of his campfire climb in golden threads up through the interlaced boughs of the forest roof, he thought the matter all over.

Yes, he had been a fool to incur the enmity of the 'breed. But must a man watch the robbing of his own traps, and say nothing? No, not if he knew himself!

McKenney grinned as he again pictured the look of pained surprise that swept Plourde's dark face, on the day when the big wolf-trap had snapped across the breed's thieving hand.

An old dog fisher had been following the white trapper's marten line, had smashed a few bait "cubbies" and chewed up two or three dark-furred marten that he had found in McKenney's small traps. McKenney, hoping to rid himself of the pest, and incidentally to collect something like a hundred dollars for the fisher's glossy pelt, had made a "double set." That is, he had made a marten set as usual, building a little bait "cubby" of chunks of half-rotted wood and bark, baiting it with the head and entrails of a grouse, and setting a small trap in the open end. Then, three or four feet in front of the cubby he had carefully concealed a powerful Number Four wolf-trap.

On the next trip over the line McKenney had come silently within sight of this "double set" just in time to see a man kneel before the cubby. Even at a distance the trapper could make out that the small trap held a dead marten.

A FUR thief at work! Vic McKenney ground his teeth in rage, and stepped behind a tree to watch developments.

The kneeling man reached for the marten, placing his other hand on the ground to steady himself as he did so, and with a metallic clank the big trap closed viciously across his fingers.

Vic McKenney leaped forward with an exultant laugh. "Haw-haw! Got a nice little surprise party then, didn't ye? What the hell ye monkeyin' with that trap fer, anyhow?"

The man was bending over, extricating his hand from the painful grip of the steel jaws. Finally he got a foot onto each of the springs, pressed them down,

The boulder smashed into the trail and, followed by a shower of smaller stones, plunged beneath the racing waters.

and released his fingers. When he straightened up McKenney was surprised to discover that it was Plourde, the 'breed trapper, who worked the adjoining watershed to where his own lines lay.

"So! Thought you'd come over here an' scoop a few free marten off'm me, did ye, ye dirty sneak?" reviled McKenney. "If ye aint good enough at the game to catch fur yerself, don't think ye kin fatten yer pack any by playin' Johnny Sneakum on my lines! Git back across the divide, where ye belong, an' don't let me see yer dirty mug in the woods ag'in this season—onless ye want a thirty-thirty pushed through it! Git goin' now, an' take—*that*—to remember my warnin' by!" And McKenney had staggered the Indian with a wicked swing to the jaw.

Plourde, nursing his bruised face, had picked up his rifle and moved away. At a distance he had turned and snarled back at McKenney:

"No man can hit Joe Plourde hon de face an' live! Maybeso I am no good wiz ze trap, eh? Monsieur McKenney will t'ink different befo' ze wil' goose come in ze spring! He will himself know how ze trap of Joe Plourde feel. An' when he jomp, an' wiggle, an' cry in ze trap, like ze baby rabbit, den will Joe Plourde laugh in his face, an'—"

McKenney's rifle jumped to his shoulder, but the 'breed had gone, melting into the deep shadows of the spruces, vanishing like a wraith of storm-driven mist.

And now, for a month, this man-trapping had been going on. McKenney's nerves were becoming frayed. His eyes burned with the furtive glance of a hunted animal. Any strange noise caused him to jump and cringe, like a sensitive horse under the lash. This nervousness was something new for Vic McKenney, but for it there was a very real reason.

ONE morning he stepped into the shed outside his home cabin. From a spike in one of the rafters he took down a haunch of venison, and carrying it into the cabin he cut a thick steak from the round. He trimmed the dried outer meat from the steak, and tossed the trimmings out the door.

One of the ever-present Canadian jays, or "gut-hawks" as the big game hunters of the North call the birds, slid down from the limb of a near-by tree, and gobbled a strip of the red meat. Instantly the jay turned over on his back, fluttered feebly once or twice, and lay still.

The back of McKenney's neck prickled as he caught the significance of the thing. Bringing the steak outside to the light he made a startling discovery: The venison had been poisoned with enough strychnine to kill a dozen wolves!

The ax beside the chopping-block by his camp door, also held the menace of death. Going to the block to split some kindlings, he happened, by good luck, to notice an almost invisible strand of rabbit-snare wire twisted around the handle. Like a trap-shy fox he backed away and circled until he discovered the sinister meaning of the wire.

Securing a long pole with a knot on

the end, he hooked the knot around the ax-handle and pulled. The ax moved scarce half an inch, and from thirty feet above, a six-foot chunk of green birch launched itself from a cunningly devised hiding-place among the thick boughs of an overhanging spruce, and plunged to the ground beside the block with force sufficient to crush the spine of the largest moose.

VIC McKENNEY admitted to himself that he was beginning to get scared. With fear came anger. If he could only force Plourde to fight in the open, like a man! That's just what he would do, by gravy! He made up a light pack and crossed the divide into the 'breed's trapping ground.

For a week he haunted the streams and ridges of Plourde's territory. He found the Indian's nondescript cabin, and watched it for two days, all to no avail. But all the time he had the feeling that he was being watched. The eerie sensation was maddening. Oh, if there were only some snow on the ground—tracking, he would bring this unpleasant business to a swift termination! But the autumn was an unusually open one, and snow failed to fall.

His trap line needed attention. He must get back to it.

As he neared his home cabin he passed along the banks of a small deadwater. Above its calm surface the dome-like roofs of several muskrat houses showed. In one of the houses, built in the reeds of the shore, McKenney had previously placed a trap. Looking at it now would save him time on the morrow.

He slid down the bank, pulled away the rushes with which he had plugged the hole cut through the wall of the house to place his trap in the nest, and peered in. Lustrous brown fur showed in the semidarkness of the little chamber—a dead rat in the trap.

McKenney thrust in a hand and grasped the muskrat. On the instant there came a muffled explosion. Something hot tore through the sleeve of his Mackinaw, searing the flesh of his arm; ripped through his clothing again, close to his ribs, and buried itself in the mud of the bank.

White-faced, slightly shaky at his narrow escape, the trapper carefully tore the top from the muskrat house. Within, cunningly arranged with a string running from the dead muskrat to a rusted trigger, was propped an old revolver of powder-and-ball vintage. Another of Plourde's traps had failed!

"Luck," soliloquized McKenney as he heaved the antiquated weapon out into the deadwater. "But she can't always hold. The sneakin' cuss is gonna git me sooner or later, if I don't stop him. I'm in here for the winter, an' I'm gonna stay. But man, wouldn't it be a comforting sort of a feeling to see that 'breed's belt-buckle over the fore-sight of my old rifle!"

Then, two days after the incident of the muskrat house, he had sprung the deadly boulder-trap with a bullet from his own rifle.

As Vic McKenney sat there in the shelter of his trap-line lean-to and again visioned those tons of hurtling rock, he was oppressed by a strange feeling of helplessness. How could he fight a man he could not see? Even now Plourde might be watching him from the deep shadows. At any moment a violet flame might wink somewhere out there among the ghostly spruces, and a bullet tear into his body! In his high-strung apprehension the trapper's imagination preyed upon him. He could almost feel the searing shock of the leaden missile. It was not pleasant to think about. McKenney moved back out of the firelight into the deeper shadows. That night he slept fitfully.

MORNING brought him renewed hope. During the night it had snowed. Not a heavy fall to be sure, just a skiff of frosty crystals that lay light as feathers on the top of exposed logs and rocks, and which on the fallen needles and sere leaves of the forest floor was almost unnoticeable. Yet there was enough so that a man who was used to the ways of the woods could follow a track. Although it ceased snowing at daylight, the sun remained obscured by threatening clouds and the temperature took a decided drop, assuring the trapper that the snow would not melt away.

"An' now," exulted McKenney, as he shouldered his pack for the twelve-mile tramp to his home cabin, "watch yer step, Plourde! Ol' man McKenney's got somethin' to work on. An' he'll foller yer track clean to the Bay if he has to—once he can get a peek at yer cussed moccasin-prints!"

It was late in the afternoon when the trapper reached his cabin. A premonition of evil gripped him as he neared the little log building. Without knowing *how* he knew it, he still knew that the 'breed had been there.

Nor was he mistaken. Across the clearing before the cabin, a double line of moccasin-tracks led from the edge of the woods to the camp door—one line coming, the other going.

Using a stick, McKenney stood far to one side and lifted the latch. Perhaps, inside, a set-gun might be waiting to be fired by a pull on the latchstring. But, no, the door swung open readily. Everything looked all right, and after a careful survey of the interior the trapper ducked his head under the low lintel and stepped inside.

The hot, quick heat of a stove is not good for raw furs when they are on the stretching boards. It dries the life from the skins, causes them to tear easily, and injures the luster of the fur. So across the far end of the cabin McKenney had partitioned off a narrow room, in which to keep the hard-won spoils of his trapline. The bark door of this room stood slightly ajar.

With his rifle barrel McKenney pushed it wide—and stood smitten speechless with righteous rage. Fox, beaver, mink, marten—all were gone. A few early caught muskrat skins alone remained, ironic reminders of weeks of grueling toil.

Seething with suppressed fury, Vic McKenney began building a pack for a long trail. Blankets, a light ax, matches, ammunition. Smoked venison, some dried fruit, tea. Flour he dared not touch until he had tried it for poison on some of the woods mice that lived beneath the hewn poles of the cabin floor. At the first streak of gray dawn he took Plourde's trail.

McKenney was no slouch at trailing; all his life he had wrenched a livelihood from the woods and waters of the North. Years of this kind of life teach a man to note the little things, things that a man of the city would pass by and never see. So as the trapper followed the faint prints of the 'breed's moccasins through the miles of forest fastness, his eyes and mind were ever busy. He could afford to let pass not the slightest sign. Some trivial peculiarity of the trail might tell him of the Indian's intent.

And so one thing came to puzzle McKenney. Although Plourde's trail ran straight to the north, and was fairly easy to follow, the trapper could see no reason why the man should stop to rest so often. The furs that the 'breed had stolen would not weigh over fifty pounds. This, added to the weight of the necessities Plourde would naturally carry, should not make a pack that need worry a seasoned woodsman. Yet about every two miles McKenney found where the 'breed had slipped his pack-straps, or had backed up to a fallen log and rested his pack on it, for a breathing spell. What heavy object he might be carrying McKenney could not guess.

THE morning of the second day on the trail found McKenney in a country he had never been in before, a country of sharp hills, of rocky escarpments—a country where an ambuscade would be an easy thing to accomplish. Here the trapper shifted his trailing tactics and began circling, cutting Plourde's track at half-mile and mile intervals, as he would have the trail of a wily old buck.

With the intention of again striking the track on the far side of a hill he could see in the distance, McKenney made a wide swing to the east. But when he had skirted the hill there was no track to be found. He swung still farther back into the west; perhaps Plourde had turned that way.

For a half-hour more McKenney kept on, searching with all the dogged persistence of a hunting weasel for the faint trace. He had nearly closed the circle now, had almost decided that he must have crossed the trail without seeing it, when ahead he saw where the frost crystals had been brushed from the low limbs of a spruce.

He strode to the spot exultantly, to find the 'breed's track, as he had expected—but heading south, in the direction from which he had come.

McKenney knew intuitively what had happened. Plourde had doubled back on his track, and had watched from some vantage-point to discover if he were being followed.

An hour later the trapper stood on the summit of a barren, rocky hill. Behind a rock he found where the Indian had slipped his pack and stood while he watched the blank expanse of a small

opening below. McKenney recognized that opening. He had passed through it something like three hours before.

"Mighty funny deal," the trapper muttered. "If that 'breed wants to get me, why the devil didn't he pick me off when he was standin' right here? Can't be more'n a hundred yards down into that openin'—an easy shot. Looks like the sneaky cuss has got somethin' else up his sleeve. Uncle McKenney's gonna watch his corners purty clost from now on!"

And "watch his corners" McKenney did. Never in all his long years of still hunting had the trapper called upon his vast knowledge of woodcraft as he did while following Plourde's trail that day. So careful was he to keep himself concealed, so intent was he upon seeing the Indian *first* at their next meeting, that he covered scarce four miles before darkness overtook him.

Bearing away to one side, leaving the track a mile behind him, he made a fireless camp. Munching some dry food from his pack, he rolled in his blankets beside a fallen log and shivered through the long night.

SPATTERS of rain on his face awoke McKenney. His first conscious thought was that the rain meant the end of the tracking. He cursed the weather, rolled his blankets, and struck off at an angle which would intersect the course of the Indian, according to the way the track was running the night before.

McKenney topped a sharp hill, paused for a survey of the country before him and caught his breath in surprise. Two miles away into the north, a thin, blue column of smoke spiraled sluggishly toward the drizzling sky.

" 'Nother funny one!" commented the trapper. "Aint no doubt but what that's Plourde, an' he must know I kin see that smudge fer ten mile. Acts jest like he *wants* me to find him. Mister Injun, I'd almost guess ye'd overplayed yer hand!"

McKenney devoted the entire day to covering those two miles. Crawling with all the stealth of a stalking lynx from bush to stone, from stone to tree trunk, he at last gained the top of the ridge from behind which the smoke had risen. His clothing was soaked from contact with the wet underbrush, and he was shaky with the cold, yet he was well content. For he knew that from somewhere, not a rifle shot below him, the campfire had been kindled.

Perhaps, after all his pains, the smoke might have been but the smoke of the 'breed's overnight fire. Possibly by now Plourde might be miles on his way. But Vic McKenney's life was at stake. He was taking no chances.

Another night of sleepless shivering in the poor shelter of a shelving boulder, and with the first gray light of dawn the trapper began, with infinitesimal slowness and caution, the descent of the steep ridge.

The hillside sloped sharply away beneath him. So steep was it in places, that McKenney had to lower himself from rock to rock by the aid of the stunted brush that grew from the crevices.

And then, directly below him, appeared a straight drop of fifteen feet. At its base was a narrow shelf. Beyond the crumbling edge of the shelf the very tips of spruces showed, warning the trapper that here was another drop of from fifty to seventy feet.

McKENNEY craned his neck over the edge, searching for some place where he might clamber down onto the two-foot shelf. He dared not risk a drop; it would be noisy. Besides, should he lose his footing when landing it meant a plunge over the edge, and death on the rocks below.

He turned his head, following the shelf with his eyes—and flattened like a surprised fox among the rocks. His blood pounded in his ears; his breath became jerky with excitement.

Twenty yards to his left the shelf broadened to a width of a dozen feet, then ended, blocked completely by a sheer wall of granite. At the foot of this wall three or four stunted spruces found sufficient soil to maintain life. Beneath the trees, constructed of boughs from their trunks, squatted a brush lean-to. Before the lean-to a blackened tea pail hung on a slanting stick above the dead embers of a campfire. And within the shelter, left as though a man had just rolled out of them, were blankets, also Plourde's pack.

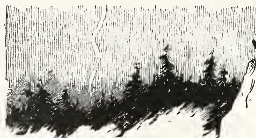
Here within McKenney's grasp were his furs—furs for which he had labored every hour of daylight throughout the fall; furs which meant something like four hundred dollars in good hard money.

And everything about the layout looked perfectly natural. McKenney's forest-trained eyes searched with painstaking detail every pebble, every twig, on the shelf below. Nothing appeared to have been disturbed that would arouse suspicion. Nature's serene touch seemed to lie on all objects.

But the trapper still refused to believe his eyes. He remembered, with a retrospective chill, the incident of the musk-rat house, the hidden menace of the poisoned venison, the apparent harmlessness of the grouse-baited boulder.

To outwit an Indian one must have the perseverance of the weasel, the endurance of the wolf, and the proverbial patience of Job. These three qualities were part of Vic McKenney's stock in trade. He wiggled himself into a more comfortable position, low among the rocks, and began his long vigil.

The day advanced. A flock of snow



buntings, harbingers of the white silence soon to come, whirred low over the trapper's head. High in the heavens a wedge of wildfowl winged their way toward the sunny lands of the South. That was all. Plourde failed to appear.

Night threw her sable veil across the Northland. McKenney ate, soundlessly chafed his numbed limbs to restore circulation, and resumed his watch.

The wan crescent of moon, struggling weakly through the dissipating storm clouds, sank below the rim of the forest in the west. An owl hooted dismally.

McKenney dozed.

A PEBBLE rattled on the shelf below. Instantly he was alert. He crawled forward, pushing his head over the edge of the ledge. The shadows were deep; he could see nothing. Yet something moved down there—something that advanced slowly, carefully toward the lean-to. The straining ears of the trapper caught the exhalation of a deep breath. Plourde had returned!

McKenney's hands fairly ached for the feel of the 'breed's throat. Shooting would be too easy, too quick. He yearned to sense the impact of his fists upon that sneering face. In his consuming desire to grapple with Plourde, the drop to the narrow ledge lost its terror. He would chance it.

"Aint no doubt but what that's Plourde," commented the trapper. "Acts like he wants me to find him!"

Plourde had passed beneath him now, was between McKenney and the lean-to. Knowing that his rifle would be of no use to him in the coming fight, the trapper laid it aside. He needed both hands with which to clutch and strike. With one unfaltering movement he gripped the edge, swung himself down the full length of his arms, and dropped.

For an awful moment he swayed in the darkness on the edge of the shelf, then regained his balance.

But there was little time to dwell on his narrow escape. Plourde, from scant ten feet away, whirled and fired from the hip. But in his surprise and haste the Indian missed. The bullet ripped rock-splinters from the wall at McKenney's left, and screamed like an angry cat as it ricocheted away into the darkness. McKenney, crouching low, dived at the point whence the flash had come.

As McKenney's hand grasped the rifle barrel and wrenched the weapon aside, it exploded again, harmlessly. Much to the trapper's surprise, Plourde relinquished his hold on the gun. So sudden, so unexpected was the move that McKenney, who had set himself to twist the rifle from the 'breed's hands, was nearly pitched off the ledge. Then as with a flirt of his hand the trapper tossed the weapon off into the tops of the spruces below and closed with Plourde, something bit sharply into his thigh.

"Knife me, would ye?" gritted McKenney. And before the Indian could deliver another thrust the trapper's hard fist landed on the side of the 'breed's neck.

The blow staggered Plourde for an instant and in that potent interval McKenney's left hand found and gripped the other's knife-wrist. His right began ripping short, jarring blows to the Indian's face and body.

PLOURDE whined like a fighting husky and clutched McKenney's throat with his free hand. His talon-like fingers worked themselves in among the cords and tendons, found the hold they sought, and set in a paralyzing grip.

McKenney's lungs were nearly bursting for want of air. His terrific exertion was telling on him, while Plourde's grip was tightening inexorably. The trapper could feel himself weakening. He must break that strangling throat-hold! Yet he dared not release that sinister knife-hand.

Although the 'breed contested every inch savagely, McKenney's fierce blows were slowly driving him back toward the lean-to. The trapper, even though his head was swimming with dizziness, sensed his slight advantage. He twisted a leg behind those of the Indian and back-heeled him. With a strange cry Plourde fell to a sitting posture, pulling McKenney down on top of him.

Using the impetus of the fall to lend power to his blow, the trapper put every ounce of his remaining strength into a straight drive for the 'breed's jaw. The blow landed fairly; Plourde's head snapped back and hit the dirt of the shelf beneath him. There was a peculiar crunching sound, a metallic rattle, and McKenney felt himself and the Indian being dragged swiftly over the edge of the shelf.

McKenney released his grip on Plourde and tried to save himself, but could not. As he toppled over the lip of the ledge he kicked himself away from the face of the rock, sprang out into the darkness.

Even as he fell the thought flashed through his mind that this was the end. . . . . And then—he was ripping down through the yielding limbs of a tree, his hands clawing wildly for a grip on the branches.

He caught a thumb-sized bough. It snapped like a straw under his weight, and he fell another ten feet—to lodge scratched and bleeding across a three-inch branch. It buckled like a bow, but held, and McKenney worked his way along it to the trunk of the tree—and safety.

FOR a long time Vic McKenney sat there in the darkness. He leaned his head against the rough bark of the spruce and sucked great breaths down into his suffering lungs. The knife-wound in his thigh bled slowly, but passing a tentative hand over it he decided that it was not dangerous.

From below all was silence. Not the faintest hint of sound to tell him of Plourde's fate. What had been that irresistible force, McKenney wondered, that had dragged them off the ledge? Surely it was no effort of the Indian's, for the trapper had felt Plourde's body go limp when the 'breed's head had been driven down onto the shelf by his blow. And then that sickening, crunching sound—and the fall! McKenney shivered.

After a time, the trapper slid carefully to the ground.

By the light of matches he found what was left of Plourde; a broken, twisted thing, lying huddled among the sharp boulders at the foot of the cliff.

Clamped to the back of Plourde's head, the inch-long teeth of its massive jaws imbedded in the skull, was a huge bear-trap. Attached to the trap by a six-foot wire was a four-hundred-pound slab of granite!

The match flickered out, and McKenney stood there in the darkness.

"I've got to hand it to him fer bein' a real trapper," he soliloquized. "Now who but an Injun would ever thought of packin' that forty-pound trap way in here, an' fixin' a weight that would trip an' pull her over the ledge when she sprung? An' baitin' it with—my furs!"

A knot gathered, drew apart, and a body came hurtling at us, three of them behind it.

Three Black Sheep

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

A tremendously exciting episode of the American Legion convention in Paris, told with skill and conviction by the distinguished author of "Rodomont," "The Black Bull," "Madagascar Gold" and other noted stories.

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

I SAT at a terrace table of the Café Mazarin, on the Boulevard, and watched three illuminated men on the curb. They were Americans, undoubtedly here for the Legion convention; and so far they were the only Legionaries I had seen in Paris who were the worse for liquor. These three were certainly lit up, were not at all quiet about it and were having a good time.

In the center of the street were seven taxies lined up. One of the three men walked out to the first taxi, opened the door, put his foot on the running-board, and spoke to the driver. Then he slammed the door, and the taxi started off. The American came back to the curb.

He grinned owlishly at his companions, and some money changed hands. The second taxi had moved up, and now he went out to it and repeated his performance. Again this taxi went chugging away empty, and he came back. More money changed hands.

I was puzzled. Just then Hollock came along and took the chair I had saved for him. I said nothing, but motioned to the three, and he watched. In five minutes the third taxi went away, and money changed hands again.

"What's the idea?" asked Hollock, frowning.

"Watch," I said, and broke into laughter. "Those birds are having some fun—and one of them knows that a taxicab driver here never looks around, but starts off when his door slams. Watch!"

We watched. The fourth chauffeur folded up his newspaper when the Ameri-

can spoke to him, nodded, and reached around to turn down his flag. The door slammed, and he started away. The American came back to the curb, unsteadily, and money changed hands again.

"My Lord!" Holly's lips twitched. "Get those three fools over here before they're pinched—I'll save this next table."

I WENT over to them.

"You're pinched, boys," I said. "Come along and have a drink before you get pinched by a *gendarme*. What you mean by this fool stunt, eh?"

"Bet," said the leader, grinning. "They bet I couldn't do it, and I done it. Sure, we'll all have a drink, maybe two! Kelly's my name, Dan Kelly of N'Orleans; this is Red Parker, and this gent with the clipped mustache is Tom Conahey."

I introduced myself, led them over and introduced Hollock, and ordered drinks from the rather doubtful waiter. Sizing up the three, I found Kelly dark, reckless, laughingly impulsive; Red Parker had a bad eye but a good grin, as though he had fought his way up through life against odds; Conahey was little, spry, amazingly alert and good-humored—the deadliest of the three, I thought, in a row.

"You're here for the convention?" I asked them.

"Sure, but we aint delegates," said Conahey with a dry chuckle. "Y'see, the three of us was over here before, in the same outfit. Well, the boys that got delegated was officers with money to spend. About a week before we sailed, we three made a haul, and we come along to see the show."

"How'd you make the haul?" asked Hollock, amused. Kelly grinned.

"We run a load o' bootleg liquor in, if you want to know!" he said. "We had to come, that was all, and we just did make it. Here's how, gents! Encore coneyac, *garçon!* This drink's on me. Dog-gone! If I meet that durned Larned tonight, I'll sure hand him one—"

Hollock and I exchanged one startled glance. That name gave us an electric shock. "Larned?" I said.

"Uh-huh," said Red Parker dourly. "He married a frog girl and stayed over here. We run into him the other day, after the parade. We all got a date for tonight, but I think he's a blasted tout for a dirty outfit, that's what I think of him!"

Hollock stood up. "You boys are going along with us," he said crisply.

"Not much we aint," said Kelly, bristling. "We aim to see Paris today. We got a bet that we can take a drink in every bar from here to the Opéra and not get drunk—"

"We need you to help us," said Holly. "And we need you now—"

"Go chase yourself," spoke up Parker. "I can lick you or anybody else that tries givin' me orders. I aint no doughboy!"

Holly turned. Passing on the sidewalk were two police *agents*. He stopped them, gave them his card, and after a glance at it they saluted briskly. He exchanged a few words, and they came over to us.

"You boys are under arrest," he said, and I was the only one who knew what was behind his desperation. "If you wont come along peaceably, we'll take you—"

"You will, huh?"

Up went the table, and the three were into us with a whoop.

By good luck, I knocked Parker stiff the first crack. Kelly plowed through everybody, but Hollock caught up a seltzer bottle, doused him blind, and then smashed him under the ear. That left only Conahey.

He was plenty, I'll tell the world! He doubled me up with a blow to the belt that winded me, knocked Holly backward into a group of Armenians, tackled both the *agents* at once and licked them, and took on half a dozen pedestrians who crowded him. Luckily, a *gendarme* and two more *agents* came along, and with the help of a few from the crowd they got Conahey down, sat on him, and handcuffed him to his friends. By this time the boulevard was blocked with a huge crowd and traffic was halted; we had a mess on our hands.

WHEN we were loading the three into a taxi, two slouching communists began to harangue the throngs and shake their fists at the *agents*. An *agent* pinched them, and they pulled guns. Some more *agents* and *gendarmes* pitched in and crowned them, and we pulled out of the riot in two taxies, with two *agents* and an inspector to keep us company as we headed for Hollock's apartment in Rue de Maubeuge.

As Holly said, however, it was worth it—if we could reach that snake Larned!

"Take off the handcuffs," said Holly.

The three faced us sullenly, defiantly, quite sobered by this time. They sat ranged in chairs along one wall, scowling at the inspector and *agents*, wondering at Hollock's giving orders, rubbing their wrists.

"They are dangerous, m'sieur," said the

Up went the table and the three were into us with a whoop. Luckily I knocked Parker stiff the first crack.

inspector, who spoke English. "Last night these same men were arrested for creating a disturbance in a café—"

"Aw, who wouldn't?" broke in Red Parker. "A guy comes along and makes a crack about the Legion winning the war, and I showed him how it was done, that's all."

Hollock looked at the inspector, who spread his hands.

"They are of the convention, m'sieur, and the arrest was not pushed farther."

"Leave them to me, then," said Holly. "I'll be responsible for them."

The battered trio stared in pardonable wonder as the police departed. When the door shut, Hollock turned to them.

"Do any of you know a man named Tellier, a former French officer?"

They shook their heads. Hollock passed cigarettes, and leaned back in his chair.

"This Tellier," he said, "is what you'd call a high-class crook, boys. He has about the finest collection of hotel rats, snowbirds and other plain and fancy crooks, in Paris. At present he's had to skip out for his health, but he has his agents here. His chief campaign is directed against Americans here for the convention. A bunch of men like ours isn't all milk-white by a long shot; in it you can find men with more money than sense, men who have weaknesses like all of us, men who'll fall for a girl or a gamble—you can even find a few bootleggers." He grinned at them. He took a Sunday paper from the table,

"Here's yesterday's paper. Did you read this article about a party given in Passy on Saturday by a bunch of crooks, and how several of them were killed in a row when the police raided the joint?"

The three nodded, watching him closely. They knew who Hollock was, had remembered him—one of the foremost war aces, he was now in the French aviation, largely as a post of honor.

"That was Tellier's gang," he went on. "They had three of our fellows—caught 'em in a neat blackmailing trap, and milked them heavily."

"It didn't say anything about that in the paper," exclaimed Kelly.

"It didn't say who won the war, either." Hollock smiled.

"What you doin' in it?" demanded Conahey.

"Trying to get Tellier," said Holly promptly. "Barnes and I are on his trail. We got those three fellows out of the trap Saturday night, luckily, and jugged the gang, but the two heads of it were killed. The others didn't know anything. We've been trying, without any luck, to get hold of the snake in the grass who tips Tellier

off to the proper Americans to work—the ones who have money, who are careless, who are out for a bit of sport. This man is an American himself."

"By gosh!" exploded Kelly, his eyes blazing. "Say, is this straight goods? Who you workin' for, anyhow? The Legion?"

"Indirectly," said Hollock. "For the sake of the Legion, yes. But the French Government doesn't let its guests be rooked and robbed so easily, Kelly. There are plenty of men in Paris whose business it is to keep you fellows out of traps."

"You look here!" snapped Red Parker abruptly. "Who's this here American guy—this traitor? You know him?"

"His name only. We've not been able to put a finger on him or find him."

"Well, spit it out! What's his name?"

"Larned."

The three looked at one another, open-mouthed.

"Huh!" said Conahey, and reached for a cigarette. "Huh! I knew there was something phony about that guy. He's got a queer look in his eyes."

The others nodded, and then stared again. They were not fools, but exceedingly sharp men, and now they saw everything in a flash — why they had been dragged here, and all. The sullen anger passed out of their faces, without a word more spoken. They settled down, lighted cigarettes, stared at me and Holly with keener, more thoughtful eyes.

"Good thing we hadn't more'n started to get lit up," said Red Parker, and laughed. "So you want help, huh?"

"If you'll give it," said Holly. "If you don't want to be mixed up in the business, you're free to go—"

"Aw, dry up!" said Kelly. "Of course we want to mix into it. You sure did the right thing to drag us here, and we're with you. What you want to know?"

"All you know about this Larned."

"Aint much. Looks like he'd sort of gone to the bad, stayin' over here. He says his wife's dead and he's durned sick of it and wants to go home. He's got some money, and says he'll show us around a bit. He don't belong to the Legion post here, but he's got friends."

"Talked with you about things and men!"

"Some." Kelly scowled as if remembering something, and Conahey broke in hotly.

"By gosh, he did! Wanted to know all about some of the boys—by gosh! I can see now where he was pumping us! I'll sure fix that guy tonight."

"No, you wont," said Hollock. "We'll attend to him ourselves, Buddy Barnes and I! Where does he live? What date did you have? What else do you boys know about him?"

They knew little, it proved; where he lived was a mystery. Finding the three of them reckless fellows, with money to spend, Larned had shined up to them. It was easy to guess that in another few days they would have been stripped and flung out. They were not angels, these three, but neither were they a bad lot by any means. Larned had told them to come that night for dinner to a Montparnasse restaurant; he would meet them and they'd spend the evening together.

"Well," said Hollock. "I'll put my cards on the table, boys. If you beat him up, we lose. If you string him along and take Barnes with you, he'll probably take you where more of his pals will be—especially if you flash some money."

"We're on," said Kelly promptly. "Only, I'd like to clean up on him and some of these frogs who are out to cut our throats!"

The others muttered assent. Hollock looked at me and grinned.

"And Barnes feels the same. All right! You four meet up with Larned at that place tonight—seven o'clock. Know where 'tis, Buddy—this side the Dome? Fine! If you stay sober until tonight, boys, and will take orders from Barnes, you can have all the ruckus you want. Suit you?"

Conahey jumped up and reached for my hand. "It's a bargain!"

OUR three visitors had scarcely departed, and Holly and I were discussing the plans for the evening ahead, when Alice Vincent showed up unexpectedly.

"I've some news for you!" she exclaimed eagerly. "I think I'm on Tellier's track!"

"Well, sit down and talk it over." Holly set out a chair for her. "No use getting excited! You're lucky enough to find anything, even Tellier!"

That was true, and I was luckier still in having found Alice. If I had my way, she and I would be taking a little trip around the world together, some day soon.

Still, she had brought us luck, and no mistake. In meeting her, I had run into Holly, and joined him in hunting down Tellier. She had almost given the man into our hands—had at least gained us

information about him, his plans and his victims. With her help, we had pulled off a good *coup* on Saturday night, thanks to which some of Tellier's agents were dead, and a number of others in the calaboose. And now—had she really got on the track of the man for whom all of the police in France were on the lookout?

"It's like this," she said. "I dropped into a movie house on the boulevard right after lunch, merely to relax for a little—I've been shopping this morning and was tired. Well, I was just in time for the reel of news-pictures. One of them showed scenes of that communist riot in Brussels—on Saturday. And walking past the camera, I was sure I saw Tellier! I'd know him again, at once, even though his mustache was gone. However, I stayed there until the next picture was over, then bribed the manager to run the news reel again, and this time made sure. It was Tellier, without a mustache!"

"Good work!" said Hollock, his quiet gray eyes shining. He passed one hand over his bald spot, and looked at me. "And we've dropped on the tracks of Larned here in town—hm! Let me think this over a minute."

I gave Alice a cigarette and lighted one for myself. Hollock strode up and down the room, then went to the window over the street and stood there, drumming a devil's tattoo on the pane with his fingers. And suddenly, abruptly, the Morse letters leaped out and reached my brain: *"Lie!"*

"Look here!" Holly turned toward us. "Alice, we've a chance to catch this rat Larned tonight; I don't want to pass it up, for we can make him disgorge information. On the other hand, we can't afford to neglect this trail you've picked up—after all, Tellier's the big game! One of us must go to Brussels, and get in touch with the police there at once; they'll give every assistance, of course."

He glanced at his wrist-watch. "Four o'clock. Alice, can you go with me to the Prefecture, get the necessary authorization, get back to your hotel and pack, and make the five-thirty Brussels express?"

Her eyes danced. "Can I? It depends on how long you spend at the Prefecture, Holly!"

"Then come on. Buddy, skip over to the Wagons-Lits, get the ticket and reservation, and meet us at your hotel. Move!"

It was well he had warned me to make no protest—that he was lying to Alice. For I knew, and he knew, that any chance of Tellier's being in Brussels was rankly improbable. The photographs of the man had been broadcast, and for practical purposes Brussels is almost a part of France, and as well policed. A man like Tellier might pass through the city, but he could not hide there. However, I did not argue, but obeyed orders.

At five o'clock Alice showed up with Holly. She spent ten minutes packing a bag and then joined us below, eager, excited at having so important a hand in the game. On our way to the *gare,* Hollock instructed her briefly.

"You're to track him—that's all. Keep us informed by wire. If nothing turns up, we'll keep on here. If you find him, we'll be there by the first train or airplane."

She nodded. When we put her on the train, she looked me in the eyes for a moment, then touched her lips to mine.

"Well?" I said to Holly, as we threaded our way out from the train-track.

"Buddy, I had to get rid of her," he said earnestly. "The notion of Tellier being in Brussels is all bosh, and you know it. She doesn't—she thinks she saw him on the screen. Fine! She'll stay there on the job. She's thorough."

"But why?" I asked dryly.

"This thing we're in. Look what happened Saturday night! It's getting worse, going deeper. To think of that girl running the risks we run, gives me a shiver. This was a heaven-sent chance to put her in safety, and I grabbed it. It doesn't matter about us—I like the element of uncertainty for myself, but not for a woman. And after the way that woman Gabrielle was killed Saturday night—"

I nodded comprehension, and relief swept through me. Alice out of it, then! Nothing could have suited me better.

"What's the ticket for tonight?" I demanded. "Grab this Larned when he shows up?"

Hollock chuckled. "It's a temptation, certainly! But it's more important to see where he leads us. Don't take your own name—warn those three scrapping devils of ours about it! Tellier has undoubtedly warned all his agents against us, but they'll not know you by sight, where they might know me. The thing to do is to follow your nose, see what happens, and if our three Paladins want to clean out the works, let 'em enjoy a free fight!"

"Where'll you be?"

"Following my nose," he said, and grinned. I guessed he wouldn't be far away when the bell rang for trouble.

THE appointed hour, then, saw me walking into the appointed café—a small restaurant with the usual "zinc" or bar at one side, and a dozen tables. It was not far from the Gare de Montparnasse, on one of the side streets off the boulevard, and was a dirty-looking hole. Our three friends were there. A green board covered their table, and they were engaged in rolling the bones. For a wonder, they were sober.

"Sit in," Conahey greeted me. "We don't eat till Larned comes, so keep happy."

So I sat in, cautioned them to remember that my name was Brown, and we went to work at the serious business of sevens and elevens. There is something hearty, opening, comradely, about a good crap game; it may be rough, but it makes you acquainted. In ten minutes the four of us were bosom friends.

Then Larned walked in, and we sent away the board and ordered dinner. He seemed very glad to meet me, and made himself cordial all around, but he was not a man to be liked. He had very long and narrow face, decorated with a clipped mustache of pale red, with a square but narrow jaw under it. His pale blue eyes had a disquieting look, for the lashes were almost invisible. His sandy hair was close cropped. He was dressed in the fashion of lower Paris, a knotted scarf taking the place of collar and tie.

We had a fair enough dinner—it's hard to get a bad one in Paris, except at *pensions*. All the time, I knew that Larned was feeling me out, sizing me up craftily; so I played the game for him, flourished money, insisted on paying for the dinner, made myself into as big a fool as I could. My three friends got the idea, and helped things along.

"Well, what's on for tonight anyhow?" demanded Kelly, turning his black-lashed eyes on Larned. "I don't know's you can show us much of Paree that we aint seen, can you?"

"A little," said Larned, and laughed. "Depends on what you want — girls, gambling, high life, sport life, tourist shows—"

"I aint no tourist," growled Red Parker. "What'd you say yourself, eh?"

"Well," said Larned, drawing up his lip in a half smile, half snarl, "my recollection of you boys is that when you get tanked, you want to raise hell. I know a place not so far from here where you can raise all you want, without interference. If you don't some one else will. And you can strike some games, and some girls if you want 'em—"

"Aw, lay off the skirt business!" said Conahey. "Let's trail along and look it over. What say, Brown?"

"Suits me fine," I said. "And since I've been sober since early afternoon, I'll set up a bottle of Martell right here and now. —*Garçon!*"

EXCEPT from French standards, a bottle of good brandy is not expensive, so I got it and the five of us went to work on it. No instructions were needed, either. When we all piled out to a taxi, half an hour later, Larned's crafty, foxy eyes were well blurred.

Larned gave the address. I could not catch it, but knew we went out the Boul' Raspail and turned off on a dark street where Algerines peered at us from the shadows. I began to regret the adventure. If there's anything I do not like, it's Algerines—their soft brown helpless faces are deceptive. A good third of the crimes in Paris are due to them, and their knives are made for only one purpose—to disembowel a man.

I paid off the taxi, hoping fervently that Hollock had followed us. We stumbled after Larned into a little "*debit*" that looked like any other boozing den—foul, cramped, sweaty, thick with men playing cards or drinking, loud with talk. Larned led us on through a door at the back, and we came out into a courtyard. Across this was another door and a stairway, which we mounted by the light of a flickering gas-jet.

Larned paused at a door, fitted a key, opened it. We passed into a T-shaped hall, with two doors at the upper end. A pallid, bearded man sat with chair tipped back, reading a paper. He exchanged a word with Larned and jerked his thumb toward the upper end. We went through the door on the right and found ourselves in a large, smoke-blue room where a peculiar sweetish and fetid odor struck my nostrils.

At one side was a bar. Men, and some women, sat about tables talking, drinking, or gambling. Larger tables toward the other end held larger groups—card games,

one roulette table, and other games I did not know. Probably half the men in the place were Algerines or Levantines, and a dirtier-looking lot I never saw.

"Go slow," I said to Kelly, as we followed Larned and the other two down the room. "I want to see what I can unearth around here."

Fortunately, the waiter arrived with the vilest cognac I ever tasted, and it distracted us for the moment. Then Larned came stumbling back, another man following.

This, at a venture, was the proprietor or owner of the joint. He was such a man as you would expect to see running a hop-house—a largely built Frenchman with

"Who the devil are you?" he exclaimed. "My name's Brown," I said. "I've got messages for you—Tellier sent me."

He grunted assent. Whether Larned were drunk or not, I was afraid of him; he was more fox than man, and those close-set, deadly pale blue eyes of his made me uneasy. I had guessed that whatever game was going on, he would not be alone in it, and I was right.

We came to an empty table, settled down around it, and Conahey demanded to know where the queer smell came from. Larned jerked his thumb toward the wall.

"Other room—hashish-smoking. Want to try it? No? Then let's have a drink. I'll go find a friend o' mine—he's somewhere around—wanted to meet you."

He slouched away. We, meantime, had become the center of attention—everyone stared at us, naturally enough, and my companions began to resent it growlingly.

luxuriant whiskers dyed blue-black, the face of a brute, and probing, merciless eyes now filled with a false cordiality as Larned introduced him. His name was Frontin.

"Are you, by chance," I asked him, "related to another Frontin—recently deceased?"

He looked hard at me. "My brother," he said.

"Then let us go to the *zinc* and have a coffee together," I said in French.

His brother had been one of the men unfortunately killed in the business of Saturday night.

WE left the table and went to the bar, and ordered Turkish coffee. Here, we were alone, and he faced me questioningly.

"Well?" he said.

"Tellier sent me," I said. He started slightly, and I saw his big hand tense.

"Who is Tellier?" he asked slowly.

Now, I had to gain time. Here was the man we wanted, not Larned—we would never screw any information out of that red-haired devil. This man was another sort. His bigness was pretense, his size masked a rotted body, his merciless eyes were too bold to be true. When Hollock would come, I could not tell, nor what he planned. I must take long chances.

"Bah! No blagues," I said. "You speak English? Good. I met Tellier yesterday. He had just heard of what took place Saturday night in Passy—"

Frontin exploded in curses, threw off suspicion. Then he gave me a stiff one.

"Heard? Then why isn't he here, instead of sneaking in Belgium!" he exclaimed. "But go on—who the devil are you?"

Belgium! Then Alice must have been right after all! And instead of getting her out of danger, we had actually pushed her on the trail of Tellier, who knew her by sight! Sweat came out on my forehead.

"My name's Brown," I said. "I've worked with Tellier before, and with your brother too—when he was croupier at Monte Carlo."

Well, this convinced him. He broke into another storm of curses; he was furious because Tellier had slipped out of Paris and was expecting his aids to do all the work. Then, too, his brother had undoubtedly been killed two days previously. He had some excuse to curse Tellier.

"Why didn't you come straight here?" he snapped out angrily.

"I only got here this afternoon," I said. "Ran into those three boys, and as they had a date with Larned for tonight, I stayed. Tellier says to go slow, and not take chances except for big stakes. Doesn't that apply in this case? Those three aren't worth plucking—"

"Aren't they? Then Larned's a blasted liar!" he said with a sneer, and leaned closer to me. "Don't you know they've got money-belts, stuffed full? Thousands of dollars—dollars, mind you, not francs!"

I shrugged. The three might have stuffed Larned with a lot of lies, or they might have the money. It was time to get off this tack.

"Well, I've got messages for you," I said.

"Where are they?"

"Do you suppose they're written, you fool?" I snapped at him. "Listen! Tellier says that nothing more can be done to strip these Americans, until the man Hollock is taken care of! That's the important thing. He sent me because I know Hollock and can point him out to you—"

Frontin's fist crashed down on the zinc-coated bar.

"That's something like!" he exclaimed. "Here he sent word around to look out for this Hollock and another man, Barnes. How the devil are we to look out for them? We've had pictures of Hollock, when he was an aviator in Morocco; but a man in uniform looks different out of uniform. We've had nothing to go on, nothing! But now it's different. What else? I'll guarantee that Hollock will be dead before tomorrow night."

"Good," I returned. "What's the game with these three birds?"

"Pluck their feathers," he said, and grinned through his whiskers. "They carry their money in belts, always. Larned says they like to fight. Well, they'll fight! The best knife-men in Paris are here tonight, waiting for them. You'd better steer clear. We'll knife them, then throw them out in the street."

THE trick was no new one in this quarter of Paris—more than one corpse has been picked up with only the mark of an Algerine knife to show what had happened.

"Well, I don't care to be a target," I said. "Suppose I rejoin them for a while, then you come and take me away, before the work begins. Why not drug them and be done?"

The brute shrugged. "Drugs cost money; knives are cheap," he said. "All right, then. We don't want any tales told of where the robbery happened, and so forth—you see? Go and keep them quiet, and I'll come and get you presently. You'll stay in Paris?"

"I hope to," I said grimly. "I'm safe from the police, and Tellier can communicate with me easily."

"Well," he grumbled, "it's time he was communicating, then! I know that old hole of his in Bruges—they may well call it Bruges the Dead! Not a girl in the town worth a second glance—well, well, run along. We'll talk later."

I sauntered back to our table—but I felt like whooping over what the big brute had just let out. Bruges, then! Not Brussels after all, but Bruges, once the

They came in then with a yell and a howl. The two pistols came out and a man fell in front of me as I shot.

commercial center of the whole western world, now called Dead Bruges—Bruges la Morte! And Tellier had a "hole" there, did he? We'd soon get all the truth out of this Frontin. The third degree is inexorably forbidden in France, but there are other ways.

I dropped back into my chair. Kelly had just finished a funny story, and all four of them were roaring. Red Parker was next to me, and I caught his attention, spoke softly:

"They've got knife-men here, waiting for you. Want to stay for the fuss or not?"

"You're damned right we do!" he said, eagerly. "Knives? Shucks! We can fix that in two shakes. We'll clean the house when you say the word!"

"All right, then watch close. When that big frog Frontin comes back, you hit him, and do it quick—put him to sleep. We'll need to use him later on."

He nodded, his sharp eyes glowing. I beckoned the waiter, and more drinks came, and were downed rapidly.

Red Parker put the other two wise to what was up, without letting the half-drunken Larned catch on. I warned him to look out for belly-cutting; he nodded.

"I've met 'em before this," he said significantly. "Got a gun? Don't use it unless you have to, then. If you lay off, they will."

I had my two old-fashioned pocket pistols, with one ball each, and his warning came in good season. The drinks came and went. I saw Kelly fingering a loose wooden table-leg, and little bantam Conahey slipped a hand into his pocket and grinned as he felt something there. Red Parker demanded another siphon of seltzer, though we had one already, and the waiter brought another of the large blue bottles. Parker grinned at me and sat back more comfortably. The smoke in the place had thickened, and the faces around all seemed intent upon our table. I wondered just who the knife-men were—the best knifemen in Paris!

Well, no matter. I had the information Hollock wanted so badly, and we knew now where to get Tellier. That was everything. No matter how big his organization, or how far it extended, when he was brought back to Paris in handcuffs it would go to smash—so far as rooking Legionaries was concerned. And this was all we cared about.

Then, suddenly, Frontin loomed through the haze, beckoning me. I pretended not to see him, and he came on, came to the table and put a hand on my shoulder.

"Ready!" I said, and rose. He thought the word for him, and nodded.

"Yes. Come, I have something to show you as I promised."

"And I got something to show you," said Red Parker, "you lousy frog! And here it is, blast you!"

He smashed Frontin with a bottle, and the big rascal went down in a limp and huddled heap.

I NEEDED to make no plans, give no orders. Kelly was the natural leader of the three, with a cooler head in a rumpus than I have, and having long since learned that when it comes to handwork gold braid usually falls flat, I kept quiet and gave attention to business.

And there was enough of business in another three minutes.

When Frontin dropped, so sudden and unexpected was it, and so swiftly done, everyone in the hall sat paralyzed for perhaps half a minute. And in this half-minute, Conahey got what he wanted—he kicked Larned's chair out from under him, picked Larned up, knocked him down, and then planted a straight left as Larned rose. That laid Larned out.

Then a yell went up. And what a yell! Cruelty in it, bestial blood-lust, the yapping of dogs who see their prey surrounded and trapped. From all quarters, it seemed, men rose up and knives flamed. Kelly put a foot against the table, a hand to the leg, and wrenched the leg clear. Conahey fumbled in his pocket, drew out a pair of knuckles and a slungshot, and whooped eagerly. Red Parker lifted a siphon and sprayed half its contents at the nearest tables, then laughed and wrapped a fist around the lead top of each siphon, and was ready. Having more faith in fists than clubs, I merely waited.

They were on us, then, from all sides —brown faces ringing us in, white teeth flashing, eyes glittering, knives flaming in the light. They came on us in a wave under the smoke-haze; a human wave, growling, snarling, rising at us, leaping swiftly—and breaking. It was unreal, fantastic, superhuman.

Not so superhuman as the breaking of them, however. Kelly was in the center with his club, Parker on the right, blue siphon swinging in each hand, I on his left; Conahey held the rear, knuckles smashing, slungshot darting and falling. The others were safe enough from those slashing blades, for they hit hard and fast, but I had only feet and hands. Height served me well, and heavy boots, for when they rose up beneath I drove the toe into the brown faces, and outreached them above.

The best knife-men in Paris? We were yelling now, all of us, drunk with the sheer madness of it, as we smashed their rolling wave, beat them down, battered them! They gathered and flung in again with a rush of weight, yelling to Allah as they came. Red Parker jumped out, met them halfway, his blue siphons reddened now. One of them went smash on a skull, and a knife sneaked in for his arm-pit, but Kelly smashed the arm that drove it with a blow of his club. They nearly had us then—three of them were on me, two lunging under Kelly's guard; but bantam Conahey was in and out like a whirlwind, and two men went pitching down across the groaning bodies.

In the sweating haze, we could see nothing but what was immediately around us. A knot gathered, drew apart—a body came hurtling at us, three of them behind it. The senseless thing was Larned, limp, horrible, head lolling. Kelly smashed the lolling head before he realized what this shield meant, and the three behind were on him. Parker was drawn away, cut off, knives slashing at him. A blade plunged in for me. I caught the wrist behind it, twisted and hurled the brown man about, broke his arm as he shrieked, and flung him at those about Kelly. Conahey was in again, out again—the rush was broken once more.

"The back window, boys!" yelled Kelly hoarsely. "Go for it—now!"

WE paused not to rest, but all four of us kicked the hurt things aside, turned and went in a rush for the back window. Tables, chairs, hurtled out of the

way; after us poured the brown men, closing in before us, but we smashed them aside and went on. Then, before they caught us, we ranged a table at either side and faced about on them, and Kelly flailed into them with roaring curses, smashing arms and faces. He was a madman for a moment—a knife had reached him. Then he calmed, as they fell back.

We had not come through that rush unhurt by a long shot. Conahey was drooping, gasping and bubbling blood, Kelly was slashed across the chest, Red Parker's left arm was spouting red from shoulder to elbow. I was scratched, nothing worse.

"Work the window, Buddy—you know the damned things!" shouted Kelly. "We'll hold 'em."

Then my eyes cleared, and I saw the trouble. The window was closed on the outside by the usual steel shutters or *volets*, pierced by holes for ventilation. I wrenched open the long double window and fumbled at the tricky catch of the shutter, while the roaring combat swept up again behind me—then I had the cursed thing swinging open, unfolding, to show a roof just below, and a courtyard below that, and gardens beyond. I turned, caught Conahey by one arm, and lifted him.

"Out with you!" I said, and shoved him to the roof. "All right, Red—look after Con! I'll hold 'em here—go on, Kelly!"

RINGED around they were now, all around, driving in like snakes, darting over the tables, fists and knives lunging at us. Parker went scrambling out. Kelly's club crunched down on a head, and broke off in his hand. I shoved him behind me, caught up a small iron chair, and pitched into the ring of brown faces. They were afraid of us now, shrank back from me—the realization filled me with wild, mad triumph. I lost my head, swept in among them, beat at them in a frenzy of battle-lust. Then—they had taken a leaf from our book. A siphon flashed blue before me, struck me over the ear, sent me staggering to my knee.

And how they came in then, with a yell and a howl!

I caught an overturned table, shoved it up before me, had an instant's time. Hands slid to pockets—I was right before the open window now—and those two little pistols came out. A man was on me from the left, knife upraised, and he fell in front of me as I shot him. Two knives were buried in him as he fell—two meant for me! A third leaped, and I shot the wielder of it with the other pistol.

Then, jumping without having time to look, I came down with a smash on the roof below and heard Kelly's laugh as he caught and steadied me.

"Damn Holly!" I gasped. "He—hasn't come—"

"T'ell wit' him!" laughed Red Parker from below. "Who won the war? Whoopee! We can lick all Paris—down, now—drop for it—"

I dropped, lit in the courtyard beside Conahey, who leaned against the wall, and Kelly followed like a cat, blood dripping down his face. It was dark down here, we could see not a thing. The open windows above erupted struggling figures. A man, knife in hand, came out to the edge of the roof, looked down, yelled, and prepared to jump. In the act, he doubled up and pitched aside, and the sharp crack of a pistol-shot leaped out of the darkness behind us.

"All right, boys," came the voice of Hollock. "We've got 'em."

THE *gendarmes* and *agents* made a noble haul of Algerines that night, enough to fill half the cells of the *dépot*. While it went on, we stayed where we were. A police car rolled into the courtyard, filling it with light, and the driver lent us a badly needed hand, for Holly was busy up above.

I had a number of minor bruises and scratches. Kelly was slashed in half a dozen places, none seriously. Red Parker would carry one arm in a sling for a while, and was badly cut about the legs. Little Conahey was the worst off, for a knife had just missed his jugular and another had reached him in the side. The chauffeur, a husky Norman, took him pickaback and carried him off to a dressing-station around the corner—Paris has the right places for all emergencies.

More or less bandaged, we slumped down, lighted cigarettes and waited, the reaction strong upon us. Little by little, the noise above quieted, and suddenly Hollock showed up beside us, a number of gold-braided gentlemen following.

"Who won the war?" he asked.

"Aw, go to hell!" said Kelly. "Anyhow, we can lick all the durned knife artists ever made!"

"My Lord, you certainly licked 'em to-

night!" said Hollock. "Anybody badly hurt?"

I reported about Conahey, and two of the police officers went off hastily. Holly looked at me and grinned.

"They're not through counting casualties yet," he said. "Do you fellows know that practically every man up there not only had police records, but most of 'em were wanted? It's a fact. And when a man's wanted in Paris, he's really wanted —it doesn't mean he's out of luck and stolen a loaf of bread!"

"Well," I said, "what the hell you think we've been doing, anyhow? Frontin said he had the best knife-men in Paris there."

"He had," said Hollock gravely. "But you've spilled the beans, all the same. Which one of you hit Frontin?"

"That whiskered frog?" said Parker with relish. "It was me."

"You smashed his skull, and he'll never talk now."

"Aw, hell!" said Parker. "I didn't mean to hit the son of a blank so hard!"

I laughed at that, for no reason, and Hollock grinned.

"And Larned's done for, likewise," he said. "All we get out of this is one grand scrap—"

"Well, by gosh, we got it!" said Kelly with enthusiasm. "And if they've done for Con, then by godfrey I'll smash every brown-belly I see in Paris! That goes!"

"It's all right," I told Hollock wearily. "Frontin talked. I know all about where Tellier is—he's in Bruges now. Got a place there. So quit your mourning."

"Bruges!" Hollock caught his breath.

The gendarmes returned, just then, with word that Conahey was being taken to a hospital but would recover with care. And he would get care, no doubt of it.

"Pile in this car," said Holly to us. "They're tickled to death about this, from all I can gather—I mean, the inspectors in charge. I expect you three lowdown bootleggers will get the thanks of the city for this job, and you'll sure get the thanks of the Legion Convention—"

"T'ell with it!" said Kelly hoarsely. "What I want right now is a drink!"

Hollock laughed. "Pile in, then, and we'll go get it!" he said. And we did.

"A Plunge in the Seine," another thrilling episode of the Legion Convention, will be described by Mr. Bedford-Jones in the next, the March, issue.

The Mystery at Mulungban

By

CULPEPER ZANDTT

Deep in the little-known Bornese jungle, the adventurous American physician Dr. Galt takes part in a grim drama played by the few English residents.

Illustrated by Joseph Sabo

As botany and horticulture were among Galt's hobbies, Her Ladyship had asked him up to Government House that morning to look at some plants which had been sent to her by the chief botanist at Buitenzorg in Java and make a few suggestions concerning an extension of the garden which she was having laid out on the Ridge. When it began to get uncomfortably warm in the sun, after eleven, they went up to one of the shaded verandas, and were still absorbed in their subject when one of the Governor's aides appeared with a request that the Doctor would see His Excellency, presently, and then remain for tiffin—which brought a smile to Her Ladyship's face, and a suggestion that they could resume their horticultural discussion later.

"Go in to Sir Laurence now, Doctor—he's been chatting with that lovely girl quite long enough, and in case she's not staying on for tiffin, I wish you to see her."

"Would it be Miss Farquhar, by any chance? I noticed her coming up the hill in a ricksha when we were out there in the garden. She's certainly handsome! Seems to be quite chummy with my friends, Lady Frances Harlingdean and Marjorie Adams—they were going

The Dyak slipped on the polished floor and went down with a crash which made them all jump.

to introduce me at first opportunity. Some mix-up in Miss Farquhar's plans, wasn't there? Didn't she come out from England with the expectation of joining an uncle and aunt at one of the out-stations?"

"Yes. But when she reached Singapore there were letters from them saying there was sickness in their district and they thought it advisable for her to remain here until conditions were a bit healthier at their station. Fortunately, the girl has a comfortable enough income of her own, so that by watching expenditures a bit she's able to come and go about as she pleases. I fancy it's the aunt who is her relative—but the man she married is exceptionally good-looking and agreeable, so that Alice is rather fond of him as well. Very much of a ladies' man, you know—a bit too much so at times—rather trying for his wife, I fancy."

"Where is their district, by the way? Up the Peninsula?"

"No—in Borneo. Rather by way of being underground politics, you know. But Sir Laurence can give you the details much better than I. Best go in and see him for an hour, before tiffin is ready."

Doctor Galt found Miss Farquhar sitting by the Governor's desk—apparently they'd been having a discussion which had been more or less serious. She smiled enough to show two lovely dimples when the Doctor was presented to her—but was plainly in anything but a care-free mood and was about to leave the room, saying that she would see them at tiffin, when His Excellency detained her for another few moments.

"Suppose you wait, Miss Alice, until I've given the Doctor some idea of the situation? You'll be able to answer questions upon which I would have little or no data. It's like this, Galt: Miss Farquhar came out from home expectin' to join her aunt an' uncle at their station in the interior of Borneo, but they wrote her to wait until they had the bubonic and cholera cleaned up a bit—which of course was quite proper advice. But she's been here three months now, and recently has been getting less satisfactory communications from them. One infers that Cadbury has been away in the jungle a good bit, regulatin' native disturbances—sickness—one thing or another—and that Lady Gwen has been in sole charge during his absence.

"The official letters I get are signed with his name in her handwriting, with her initials, *'per-pro.'* Four letters, presumably, were signed by Cadbury himself when he was back for a while—in fact I'd never have questioned the signatures, but Miss Farquhar is positive he didn't sign 'em, an' has pointed out little discrepancies that I had overlooked. In the letters from her aunt, Lady Gwen would appear to have the situation very well in hand—provin' herself a splendid executive—noticeably better, I fancy, than her husband. But to a girl in Miss Alice's position—waiting on here indefinitely—the letters seem to her too vague—leaving a good many of her questions unanswered, as if her aunt were much too busy to consider anything outside of the immediate task in hand. She's said nothing about Cadbury's bein' ill or incapacitated in any way—but he seems to be at the station very rarely."

THE Doctor had been studying the girl smilingly. Now he said: "Would you mind very much if I ask some rather direct questions, Miss Farquhar? I've not the least idea why His Excellency sent for me or what you may have in mind concerning my being taken into your confidence to this extent. But if you wish me to understand the whole situation as you see it, and what you have at the back of your mind, I should have more data along certain lines. Any objection to that?"

"Quite the contrary, Dr. Galt! Marjorie Adams and I have become quite chummy since I came out—she's given me a good bit of information concerning Borneo, from her experiences with you a few months ago in the Rajah of Soeltoenak's state—told me you're by way of being an adopted uncle of hers and said I could get more information from you concerning the interior of Borneo than anyone else I was likely to meet in Singapore at present. In fact, that's why Sir Laurence asked you to come in and talk with us. You see—on top of a vague uneasiness I'm beginning to feel about my aunt and uncle—His Excellency has just received a letter sent out from the back-country by a young scientist who is collecting data for the Royal Society. He was in Mulungban about two months ago—saw Lady Gwen—had but one brief glimpse of my uncle—and said nothing of any sickness worth mentioning. From what Mulungban news there was in his letter, the inference was that my aunt had the Dyaks thoroughly in hand—was decidedly respected by the sultan, Akhazul Bendahara Khalim—and seemed to be carrying on in my uncle's absence rather better than he had been doing himself.

"Mr. Walthorpe, apparently, was rather impressed by Lady Gwen, but though of course he was too polite to write anything of the sort in a letter to the Governor, didn't seem as strongly attracted by her as the men used to be in London. Probably he's more of a scientist than a ladies' man—but there was something more than that in the general tone of his letter, as if he had remained at her station no longer than necess'ry to check up some of his supplies which were going-in for him through there. Usually, the men cook up excuses of one sort or another to stick around and enjoy her society when opportunity comes their way. Now—with your knowledge of Malay life in the back-country of Borneo, what would you make of all this?"

"Tell me something about your aunt and uncle—describe them."

"Well—Lady Gwen stands about five feet six, and weighs around ten stone. Very good figure—but solid rather than too soft. Fond of out-door sports—quite good at them. Rides well—a crack shot with gun or pistol—knows *ju-jitsu.* Rather dark complexion, but handsome. Belongs to the younger branch of the Hertfordshire Willoughbys—her uncle is the Marquess of Endelstone—and deep inside of her, she's like all the rest of them, immensely proud of their caste—takes pride in keeping up the traditions of the family in the way of honorable dealing and having nothing to do with rotters of any sort. Uncle Cadbury was a younger son before his two brothers died and a berth as *attaché* was obtained for him in the Washington embassy—though it's doubtful if he ever gets very high in the diplomatic service because he hasn't enough reserve and self-control for it, or the special type of brain necess'ry, I fancy. He's now in line for the baronetcy when his father dies—will probably settle down at their country-place in Bucks and leave the service when he comes into the title."

"Have any of the Singapore official lot gone in to see them since they took over the station?"

"No—there are reasons for avoiding that which Sir Laurence will explain to you presently. Three or four of the scientists and botanists have stopped over with them a few days on their way through to more inaccessible parts of the Bornese jungle—and an American from Manila acts occasionally as outside agent for the Sultan in matters which he doesn't care to have the Dutch Government know about. As far as I know, those are the only whites they've seen since they went there. They've managed to rig up a private radio-installation with enough power to get the Singapore station under favorable atmospheric conditions—so that they're usually in touch with His Excellency if anything comes up requiring instructions from him, in code. A Dutch Resident is supposed to be in the little town around the Sultan's palace, merely in an advisory capacity—but those sent in there have taken one sickness or another, and several months go by before the next one turns up. Now I'm going to see Her Ladyship before tiffin—but Sir Laurence will tell you the rest."

WHEN the girl had left them, the Governor pulled down a large-scale wall-map of Borneo where both could examine it as they sat by his desk.

"Have you ever been in the region around Mount Batoe, Doctor?"

"Yes—I've climbed to within a thousand feet of the top when I was on a botanizing trip, though my two China boys were the only ones not afraid to go with me. Soeltoenak—my friend the Rajah's state—lies northeast of it. (I see you've outlined it, roughly. The borders are wrong in three or four places, but of course you had no survey to go by.) Batoe represents the hub of a five-spoke wheel—each spoke being one of the chief mountain-ranges in Borneo, radiating east, south and southwest—and the valleys between being those of the bigger rivers—the Sesajap, the Kajan, the Kutei, the Barito and the Kapuas. I've never been in the Mulungban district—but it lies southeast of Mount Batoe and nearer to it than Soeltoenak. Dense jungle on the slopes—natives all afraid of evil spirits on the mountains—can't make 'em go up."

"Your knowledge of the terrain saves me a lot of rather incomplete description—so I can get down to Cadbury at once. Of course he's not supposed to be in the British service at all. I fancy you'd call it a sort of export manager for the Sultan—with the additional duties of an efficiency-expert in gettin' the most out of the Dyak labor without offending the brownies until they do not work at all. It requires a good bit of tact an' more knowledge of the Malay temperam'nt than he had when he went in there. Well, d'ye see, there's a deal of unrest among the brownies all over Asia at present—egged on by the Russian-Manchurian soviet—sort of preliminary to a show-down between white an' brown races all through the East. The Dutch have been successful colonizers because they've managed heretofore to keep white interference out of their Islands—but it's now the brownies themselves who are spreading the propaganda, an' it's quite necess'ry that our Indian secret service should be as well informed concerning what goes on among 'em in the Dutch islands as in the Straits, India or China. As you doubtless know, there are several of the Malay sultans who have Englishmen in their employ in one capacity or another—but chiefly as their own political advisers. The Dutch Residents at their little capitals naturally tell 'em nothing which might be against the Dutch policy in future—but the English an' Americans give 'em more of the all-round point of view and I suppose frequ'ntly assist in smuggling out a cargo of rubber, coffee or tobacco. All of the East Coast sultans are independent rulers—but acknowledge Dutch supremacy. Ethically, we're not supposed to meddle with the Dutch policies in the least an' we try to avoid doing so—but they do meddle a bit with ours, under the rose, and I fancy our men often see things they're not supposed to see. If ever it comes to a general revolution out here, the white races must either settle the question of supremacy by costly fighting an' stamp the thing out for another hundred years or so—or else turn over Asia to the Asiatics and get out. I fancy it'll prove to be the British in the long run. An' in that case, the sultans already favorably disposed toward us will be inclined to accept British protectorates—political and commercial supervision over their states. That's Cadbury's real object in being out there—fostering good-will toward us while he handles the Sultan's labor as he can't handle it himself.

"And actually, he's more or less con-

nected with your secret service—turning in to you data on the native conditions there and all that?"

"Well—it's not admitted, you know—but it amounts to something like that. If there were any tangible official connection, he would be under orders from the Governor of British North Borneo, who is nearest by any practical means of communication, or from Rajah Brooke of Sarawak, who is nearest in actual distance across the mountains. But he has no communication with either of them in order to avoid any appearance of politics. Whatever requisitions are sent in to him go by supply-boat from the Straits Governm'nt—which sometimes goes up the river some distance in the high-water season, but usually sends up the stuff in a launch and meets it again when it comes down the river from a point where the supplies are transferred to a native *banco* or small *prahu*."

"H-m-m—what sort of stuff goes in to him that way?"

"As little as possible, now. When his predecessor first took the berth at the Sultan's request, we sent fittings to make the station comfortable in every practical way—piano, phonograph, radio-outfit in small packages, cots, hangings, electric fans to work on the Sultan's current—he has his own telephone and lighting systems. Materials for constructing a swimming-pool—tennis-set—guns an' pistols enough to defend the station temporarily—marking everything in the Sultan's name as if for his own use. But now it'll be mostly tinned foods, beverages, clothing, medical-stores, reading-matter, disinfectants. That sort of thing. One item they requisitioned two months ago was six barrels of lime—which of course was quite all right for disinfectin' and possibly other purposes. Only point which makes me recall it was the amount. With the sickness Lady Gwen spoke of in her letters to Miss Farquhar, a hundred barrels would have been nearer the mark, presumably. On the other hand, had it been merely for drains around the station-bungalow, one or two barrels would have been quite sufficient. Naturally, there's no wall plastering to be done—goes to pieces from dampness in the rainy season."

"HAS Cadbury any knowledge of medicine?" inquired Galt.

"Merely a smattering of first-aid and general sanitation—as all our men are supposed to have in the out-stations. But Lady Gwen had two or three years of medical study with a bit of practical surgery thrown in. She amputated the leg of a Dyak who'd been bitten by a cobra last year—made a very workmanlike job of it. The brownies all know that she unquestionably saved the man's life."

"Well—as I understand it, you and Miss Farquhar are beginning to think there's something decidedly wrong out there—but you can't put a finger on what it is that you vaguely suspect? Eh?"

"Er—quite so. Nothing to prevent Miss Farquhar's staying here in Singapore indefinitely if she pleases, or going home to England at any moment. But she's always been fond of Lady Gwen, and has liked Cadbury ever since he married her. I fancy Miss Alice is beginning to think Cadbury seriously incapacitated—dead, or missing—and her aunt in serious diffic'lties of some sort which she's too plucky to let us know about. Faith, she's got me around to the point of fancyin' much the same thing—if I could assure myself that there might be circumst'nces in which she couldn't or wouldn't communicate with me in code, by radio! That's what sticks in my mind. It's difficult to be convinced that she'd not communicate with me if the situation is at all serious. On the surface, you understand, there's no official connection between 'em and the Straits or any other British Colonial governm'nt. They're merely two British subjects employed by His Highness the Sultan of Mulungban. Injury to or flagrant abuse of them naturally would be taken up as a Governm'nt matter—protection of British subjects.

"But to all intents, they're out there strictly on their own. On the other hand, under the surface, we render them every possible assistance an' keep much more closely informed concerning what may be happening than anybody dreams we are doing. Now, considering all these points, and with your knowledge of general conditions out there—what would you say may be going on?"

"That's a difficult question to answer, Sir Laurence. Much depends upon Cadbury's treatment of the Dyaks and his manner with them. If he's been indulging in any foolish abuse of them, they're likely to stick his head up on a pole at any moment. If he's learned how to handle them and

That evening the two Chinese were squatting in a circle of Dyaks around a fire; there were hints of certain matters.

Lady Gwen is as much of a diplomat as you say, they're getting everything they want from the brownies. If there really has been much bubonic and cholera, he'd probably go down with either much more quickly than she. If he's been drinking much, he'd pass out. But your scientist-chap—Walthorpe—mentioned no disease at all, and he'd have been likely to if he saw any evidence of it. Which adds to the appearance of mystery surrounding the situation.

"All we have are these presumable facts: Cadbury hasn't been around the station except for brief visits during the last three or four months. Lady Gwen—after getting her niece out here to visit them—is evidently determined that she shall not go in there for the present, at least—possibly not at all. She appears to have taken over the entire management of the Sultan's affairs entrusted to Cadbury and to be handling them in a satisfactory manner. But there is an inference from the tone of her communications that she is strung-up to a taut, nervous pitch all the time—under a pretty heavy strain of some kind with the chance of going to pieces at some moment when it will be disastrous to herself and Cadbury, at least—incidentally destroying all that your government hoped to accomplish through them. It seems to me that one of your service men could be of assistance to her if he were disguised to avoid recognition as a government agent."

"That's just the diffic'lty! Sooner or later, he'd be spotted as a service man—particularly if he had to give any evidence in a court. I've been thinking that if I could find some one who knows the country an' would consider accepting a confidential commission from the Straits Governm'nt—some man not in our service at all—I'd be glad to send him out for the purpose of ascertaining just what the conditions are. Miss Alice has been talking with your adopted niece, Miss Adams, about her experiences in Soeltoenak with you—and is quite determined to go along if I find the right sort of man to send in."

"Hmph! I could have told you what was in her mind after she had been talking a few minutes. Marjorie sneaked aboard my boat when I left for Soeltoenak and didn't show up until we were at sea—knowing that I'd not have taken her willingly. But I must say she proved herself one of the few women who can go to places like that and come out none the worse for it. Miss Farquhar may be of the same type and may not—no way of telling until

one actually sees her under such conditions. Coming right down to cases, Sir Laurence, I suppose you'd like to have me go out there for you—eh? As you've paid me quite generous sums for similar commissions upon one or two other occasions, you think that entitles you to put the proposition up to me, anyhow. Eh? Well—I've nothing else on hand at present. Suppose I accept your commission—go out there and have a look-see—render Lady Gwen any assistance that may be necessary? Could you communicate with that Royal Society chap, Walthorpe, before I get in there? Would he agree to come down and meet me at the station?"

"I fancy that might be managed without much diffic'lty. Walthorpe would consider any official suggestion from me. The Sultan has a low-powered radio-outfit with which he communicates with Rajah Brooke at Kuching, Sarawak, across the mountains—and he would send a runner up into the jungle where Walthorpe and his men are camped. What would be your object with him?"

"He knows me by name and I've heard quite a lot about *him*. Just the sort of man I'd pick to stand by me in any sort of a mix-up—speaks Malay better than I do, and understands their oblique point of view, perfectly. We would appear to be two professionals interested in scientific matters to the exclusion of everything else—no suspicion of politics anywhere."

"My word, Doctor! You're absolutely right! I'll see that Walthorpe meets you at the station. But—how about Miss Farquhar? Will you take her? She's an out-of-doors girl—good nerves, I fancy."

"Yes—and my own China boy, Ling Foh. He's worth a dozen. I fetched him down the Peninsula after that mess in Pranganoe, and he's stuck to me like fly-paper ever since. There's only one consideration which induces me to take the girl along. I see little risk getting her in there as far as the station—after which, she'll be with her aunt who invited her to come. Presumably she considers the neighborhood safe enough for the young lady."

AS the government supply-steamer was leaving for Jesselton and Sandakan at the end of the week, with two river-launches on her boat-deck, the Doctor and Miss Farquhar went out on her, accompanied by the highly efficient Ling Foh.

The master and crew of the steamer minded their own business exclusively. If the Doctor's party let it be understood in the British North Borneo ports that they were merely cruising to get some idea of the Borneo coast, that went with the officers and crew, also—as far as anything they said ashore. But when the boat reached the delta of the Kajan there was plenty of water on the bar for their light draft, and they went up the river nearly a hundred miles—anchoring in mid-stream and sending the Doctor's party farther up in one of the launches.

After going eighty miles, it passed a landing on the bank for one of the only three roads in Eastern Borneo—there were excellent reasons for not taking it—and went on another seventy miles to where a jungle-path led by a short cut to the little station near the Mulungban rubber-plantations where Cadbury was in charge of the Dyak labor-camp which, by this time, had assumed all the characteristics of the usual jungle *kampong*, with its nipa huts and community-house on posts six feet above the ground, built along a little creek which ran into the river further down. From this labor-*kampong* a narrow private road led through the jungle eight miles to Bakit-Satu, the little town which was the Sultan's capital, with his 'dobe palace—faced and lined with colored tiles—on higher ground along the northern edge of it. Bordering this road was a line of trees from which the lower branches had been lopped off, carrying telephone and electric feed-wires to the labor-*kampong*.

WHEN the party reached the station bungalow and its "guest-annex"—another bungalow one hundred feet away—they were told that the Memsahib or Tuana had gone up to Bakit-Satu for a conference with His Highness, but that the Tuan Walthorpe had arrived with his China boy after she left and was then napping in the guest-bungalow.

Walthorpe came out on the veranda at that moment to welcome them—his "boy" immediately fraternizing with Ling Foh and taking him inside to stow the luggage in the proper rooms. Walthorpe proved rather reserved in manner but exceedingly pleasant. When Miss Farquhar had gone to her room to freshen up, he strolled to the outskirts of the *kampong* with the Doctor and began asking for information.

"I could have made excuses to the governor, you know, an' remained in my own

diggings—because he's no real authority over me beyond the courtesy of forwardin' my supplies. But I've wished to meet you, Doctor—been hearin' about you ever since I came out in this region—an' the fact of Miss Farquhar's accompanyin' you gave me some uneasiness—made it seem as though I might be needed here. Otherwise —well—I'd have avoided this station except when it might be necess'ry for me to pass through, goin' in or out."

"That indicates pretty well our reason for coming here, Walthorpe. What's wrong with this place, anyhow? Lady Gwen has warned Miss Farquhar of bubonic and cholera as a reason for not having her in—but you made no mention of them in your letters to the governor."

"Naturally—because I saw no evidence of anything like an epidemic an' none of the Dyaks said anything to me about it. Oh, there may be sporadic cases, here an' there—we always get that much in the back-country, anywhere in Asia. But there's been nothing for whites to consider as far as I know. Aside from that—well—there's no surface indication of anything seriously wrong here. But in a few hours you'll get it sub-consciously, I fancy. I've seen Cadbury but the once—nearly three months ago. Good-lookin' chap—agreeable manner. Drinks too much—has a very appreciative eye for the Dyak women —insisted upon havin' one of 'em to wait upon the table instead of the usual house-boy. She was handsome—no gettin' around that. He said he'd always had a cravin' for everything beautiful—liked to surround himself with beautiful things whenever he could—saw no reason for havin' a rather ugly house-boy pass his food to him when a handsome girl was available. Of course the girl and her family were flattered, gave themselves airs among the other Dyaks in consequence.

"That sort of thing alone is apt to breed trouble when you're livin' among such races, an' the whites avoid it if they know their book—unless, of course, a chap is at an out-station all by himself an' goes native from sheer loneliness. Well—I've not seen Cadbury since then. He was gone when I came back up the river—lookin' for spots in the jungle favorable for clearin' an' rubber-plantin', Lady Gwen said, but my boy told me none of the *kampong* Dyaks had gone with him; I fancy he may have taken a couple of the Sultan's men from Bakit-Satu. I got in here possibly four hours ago—naturally went into the livin'-room of the station bungalow for a glimpse of the last gazettes which came out—an' I saw no sign of the good-lookin' Dyak girl either about the bungalow or around the *kampong*. Y'know the beggars usually come out for a look-see when any visitors arrive—practically the whole population.

"Of course one asks no personal questions of the brownies, either about the Tuan or any of themselves—that's generally picked up by one's boy if you're really curious to know about any individual, but I wasn't inquirin' about one of their women —bad form. Last time I was here, Lady Gwen seemed a bit changed in some ways. Just as handsome an' pleasant in manner, you know—but rather as if she were under a strain of some sort that was giving her enough to do in handling it. If I'm any judge of the Dyak mind, an' I should be by this time, the beggars all respect her immensely. But somehow I sensed a vague impression that they fear her as well. She's saved the lives of at least half a dozen by medical treatm'nt an' fairly good surgery—but they say she's nerve enough to shoot any one of 'em if he really deserves to be shot, an' I fancy they'd all back her up in it. Now—what's the answer? There is something wrong here—but *what?* She's carryin' on the work of the station a dev'lish sight better than Cadbury ever has—sent a prime shipm'nt of rubber an' tobacco down the river in *bancos* that got it aboard a cargo-boat twelve miles inside the bar. She steamed out again an' disappeared without bein' seen by the Dutch patrol-boat. An' Lady Gwen knew she was goin' to pull it off beforehand—made all the arrangem'nts herself. Of course, any of these independent Sultans on the east section of the Island has a perfect right to ship an' sell his stuff wherever he pleases—but if the Dutch catch a shipm'nt goin' out or have proof that one was sent, they make the shipper pay an export-tax, one way or another."

"HOW does she stand with the Sultan?" asked Galt.

"Couldn't stand higher. When she first came up, he admired her immensely—tried to flirt, every chance he got. He's an Oxford man, you know, an' quite good-lookin' if a woman doesn't mind *café-au-lait* in the decorative scheme. But since Cadbury has taken to campin' out in the jungle so much, His Highness treats Lady Gwen

with much more formal respect. In fact, from what my boy has picked up, one would almost say he has more or less subconscious fear of her, like the common Dyaks. Of course she can be the very essence of dignity when she fancies it necess'ry—entirely courteous, d'ye see, but absolutely distant.

"It's possible Akhazul Bendahara may have carried his flirtatious experimentin' a bit too far when he knew Cadbury wasn't around or likely to materialize suddenly—an' that she quietly put him in his place so thoroughly that he's still a bit dazed over it. But there's a feature in that proposition which may not have occurred to her—yet—but which is bound to come into *his* mind sooner or later. With Cadbury nowhere in sight, she's just one handsome an' healthy white woman absolutely alone among thousands of Dyaks who would do anything the Sultan ordered, an' do it on the jump, no matter how much they thought of her. If he has her fetched up to his palace some day for his own amusement, he knows the English would make a row over it, but he's fairly sure that neither they nor the Dutch Governm'nt would go so far as to send a punitive expedition up here strong enough to defeat his Dyaks an' capture him—this not bein' India or the Straits. As long as he's convinced she has nerve enough to kill him an' would certainly find a way to do so if he went too far, he'll let her respectfully alone. But if her nerve happens to slip—just once! Eh?"

"You think that may be at the bottom of the strain she's under? I don't—not quite. A white woman always has it in mind to kill herself in any contingency of that sort and doesn't worry about it so much. That has been demonstrated over and over. Her being alone here, and carrying on the work of this station, wouldn't account for the vague depression which I'll admit I already begin to feel creeping over me. It's not malaria or jungle-fever—because the Dyaks show no signs of it, and from all accounts Lady Gwen is in excellent health. But if I believed in disembodied spirits at all—as all the brownies do—I'd swear there are cold, clammy ghosts prowling about this *kampong* and breathing down the back of my neck every little while!"

"My word! That really *is* the sensation, you know! Of course you an' I aren't fooled by any such rot. What we're prob'ly gettin' is a reflex from the native mind hereabouts—reactin' on us. By Jove! That would account for the way the beggars act! They believe there are ghosts about this place! But *whose* ghosts? What makes 'em prowl? What incantation will make 'em behave an' take themselves off? Eh? What?"

WHEN Alice Farquhar reappeared, with a clean madras shirt and the mud brushed from her riding-breeches, she seemed listless, to the two men. Presently she asked if there were any accommodations for visitors at Bakit-Satu—and Walthorpe said there was a very comfortable bungalow for the Sultan's visitors near the palace, on the high ground. After a moment's consideration, she said:

"How could we get up there—before dark?"

"The usual hammocks—swung from poles carried by four men to each person. When Lady Gwen returns, His Highness undoubtedly will send her down in his motorcar—this road of his is none too good for autos, but with the balloon tires they manage very well. I'd rather not ask him to send a car for us. But there's plenty of time to see Bakit-Satu—it's not so much of a metropolis."

"Hmph! The way I feel, I'd rather not wait! Do you fancy I'm coming down with fever, Doctor? . . . . I'm frightfully depressed—more jumpy than I can remember feeling at any time before this!"

"Just nerves, Miss Alice—that's all! Some places have a way of affecting people like that—Walthorpe and I have both noticed it here, but as nearly as we can find out there's no sickness at present so it's probably psychological. Your room is comfortable—isn't it? Mine looked very decent—much better in fact than one would have any reason to expect in a place like this. Electric lights—running water from the big storage-tank up there on the higher ground, and unusually good water, too—from a spring, I fancy. Evidently, the Sultan wished to make his commercial manager comfortable."

"Oh, as far as bodily comfort goes, it's much ahead of what I fancied they could have in a place like this—but I certainly have a royal fit of the blues and I don't fancy I'll sleep a wink tonight!"

"Oh, yes, you will—trust me for that! Hello! That must be your aunt coming in, now—I hear a car bumping along the road."

AFTER the steamer had left Sandakan, when it was too late to stop them, Lady Gwen had received a radio-message from Singapore that they were coming—so was not surprised to find them at the station when she returned. Otherwise it would have been a staggering jolt, as her niece was about the last person on earth she wanted there at the time. Having been warned in advance, however, she put a good face upon the matter and welcomed them cordially enough. As far as either of the men could judge, her poise was perfect and her nerves in excellent condition. As she stood chatting with them in her riding-breeches and solar helmet, she was a most attractive woman—with some finer quality of command which would have made her a dominant figure anywhere. Never for an instant did she appear to be at a loss for the right word or the proper decision upon anything the natives put up to her. And as the darkness fell with tropic suddenness, she said that dinner would be ready almost immediately and nobody was to change for it.

"At times, we make rather a function of dinner and dress—just to avoid getting into sloppy habits. But with Mr. Cadbury away and all of us fairly tired, I fancy, there's no sense in bothering. Did you by any chance fetch down your violin, Mr. Walthorpe?"

"Why—er—no, Lady Gwen! I was to meet the Doctor, d'ye see—with no tellin' just what sort of a scientific hike he might have in mind—so I came down light. But I hope you'll play for us just the same?"

"Of course—if you wish. And Alice has a very good contralto."

Ling Foh asked if the Tuans would listen to something he had heard.

"Which will have to wait until the climate lets it rest up a bit, Aunt Gwen—I'll not risk it tonight! But I don't mind playing—after you—if I know any of their favorites."

IT was meant to be a rather gay little meal—with a sober-faced Dyak giving them excellent service and wine of exactly the right temperature. It was swimming along nicely, past the chicken-and-curry, salad, jelly—when the Dyak slipped on the polished teak floor and went down with a crashing tray and a scattering of dishes—which made all of them jump as if they'd been shot. While their nerves were still a bit ragged over this interruption to the meal, Alice Farquhar suddenly broke off what she was saying and peered into the shadows at the back of

the living-room where there were a passage leading back to the kitchen and two doors—one opening into Lady Gwen's private room and the opposite one into Cadbury's study, used as a business office as well. The girl's face was tense—colorless.

"Listen! Don't you hear those footsteps in the study? Could Uncle Cadbury have returned?"

The men heard a faint something which might have been footsteps—but Lady Gwen shook her head.

"Any bungalow in the tropics sways a bit on its posts, so far above ground—has all sorts of little creaks one soon gets used to. Not in the least like a house built upon solid ground, you know."

It was a perfectly reasonable explanation—yet somehow there was something uncanny in the very air. Galt, from his first talk with Alice and the Governor, had had his own theory as to what the underlying mystery at the station might prove to be—but it was an ugly one. Natural enough in the circumstances—but the sort of thing one prefers keeping out of his mind as much as possible. When Lady Gwen had been playing for them a while,—Debussy, Tschaikowski, Liszt,—he ventured a question, watching her face without appearing to do so.

"Er—Lady Gwen—what's become of the handsome Dyak waitress our friend, here, was telling us about? He seemed to have been quite impressed with her unusual good looks—and we were anticipating an opportunity for seeing whether he was hypnotized or really had a sense of beauty."

He thought some of the color drained from her cheeks, but couldn't be certain in the red glow from the piano-lamp. Her manner, certainly, gave no evidence of her being unpleasantly startled, as she replied calmly:

"He meant the one Cadbury liked so much, of course. We've had but two Dyak girls for table-maids, and the other certainly was no beauty. The good-looking one disappeared a few months ago—may have gone to one of the other *kampongs*—up to Bakit-Satu or somewhere else. I fancy her mother and sisters have gone also—there were no men in the family. But Mr. Walthorpe was justified in his opinion; the girl was both handsome and well-formed—a strain of white blood, possibly."

MEANWHILE, in the guest-bungalow, Ling Foh and Walthorpe's China boy were having a talk in low Chinese gutturals which brought a look of profound respect to the eyes of Wang Chu—a description of the Tuan Hakim whom Ling Foh served and of certain things known about him. He was of ancestry most illustrious, to begin with—one saw that in his face and manner. But more than all other things in importance, he was affiliated with the Great *Tong*, as one might see, if observant, when the Tuan Hakim was reading of an evening and absently fingering a cube of the finest ivory measuring three-quarters of an inch, upon one face of which was a peculiar Chinese ideograph inlaid in solid gold. Both Cantonese were in agreement that the status of such a personage should become known at once among the Dyaks, several of whom were themselves among the lower order connected with the Great *Tong* like many of the Malays, Shans, Tamils and Siamese. It was obvious that when this was known throughout the District, matters which the Tuan Hakim desired to know would be communicated through them without hesitation, no matter how much tabu there might be in such matters.

GALT, of course, had said nothing to Ling Foh of his vague suspicions—he didn't have to. The faithful Cantonese had a way of salting down occasional remarks overheard and afterward piecing them together—so that he probably knew as much as any of them concerning outward conditions at the station when he arrived there. Being psychic like all Orientals, he surmised a good deal which might or might not have happened under the surface—and later that evening the two Chinese were squatting on their heels in a circle of Dyaks around a fire on a clay platform in the community house, the glow bringing out in strong relief the brown faces against the background of deep shadow, and there were muttered questions and roundabout hints of certain matters very seldom discussed. On the second night following, Ling Foh asked if the Tuans would listen to something he had heard, while Wang Chu kept watch outside the bungalow to warn them if anyone approached—Miss Farquhar being with her aunt at the larger bungalow, playing over some of her music.

They made their way through the fringe of bush and saw that it was the thick roof of the storage-cellar which was burning.

TO describe his communication in Ling Foh's "pidgin" would be tedious for the reader, as there was a good deal of it. Boiled down, this was the substance: In the edge of the jungle, on the outskirts of the *kampong*—in a small clearing of its own—the first Resident had built a storehouse for such perishable food and materials as needed a cool place to be kept in good condition. It was practically a cellar eight feet below the ground-level, with concrete walls and a rammed-earth floor—covered with a roof-thatch over three feet thick to prevent any heat from the sun getting inside. The gable-ends were of concrete with a small iron ventilator set in each and there was but a single door, of thick teak—and padlocked.

Several months before, the supply-boat had fetched around a number of packages and cases—among them, six barrels of lime. And two or three weeks after all of these had been stowed in this isolated storage-cellar, Her Ladyship, the Memsahib, had seen a few big jungle-rats in it, and shot three of them—plugging up the hole in the floor which they had dug to get in. All rats are plague-carriers and Lady Gwen had very good sanitary reasons for not particularly fancying cellar-storehouses for food in a tropic jungle. So she'd had another storehouse built at the edge of the *kampong* on posts ten feet high—with an air-space between walls, floor and roof—and had removed all the stores from the cellar except the six barrels of lime, several charpoys and empty packing-boxes. After which, she announced her intention of destroying every rat at the station by trapping them with poisoned food.

She had her Dyaks dig a pit in the floor of that cellar six feet long, four feet wide and five deep—at the bottom of which they laid slices of toasted cheese scattered among bacon-rinds and cooked meat with cyanide dusted over them, and then opened up the hole which the rats had dug originally. Within a week there were over a hundred dead rats on the bottom of that pit, with lime sprinkled over them. All of this, of course, was a purely sanitary measure, obvious even to the Dyaks—obvious to the governor at Singapore or any medical officer of his staff had it been mentioned to them in a letter—obvious to the Sultan, when he heard of it. But that wasn't all of the story connected with that cellar, and the rest of it has never come out except in

surmise—without proof. Only their fear of the Great *Tong* induced the Dyaks to give the two Cantonese their slant on it that night around the fire in the community-house, with evil spirits hovering in the shadows behind them, as they thought—and they didn't tell all, then!

EVERYONE at the Station knew that Cadbury was fooling with the handsome Dyak girl every chance he got, when he thought his wife wouldn't notice it. To the Malay mind, that was all right enough as long as he paid the girl's family for her and the Memsahib raised no objections. They had their own code and knew the Memsahib had hers. It was distinctly up to her in their viewpoint—and they were content to look on. When one buys a good padlock, he gets two keys with it. One of the keys to the storage-cellar was on Cadbury's chain—the other, he tossed in a drawer of his desk, where Lady Gwen had no trouble in finding it. When you come to think of it, that cellar was a fairly isolated place if one desired to spend an evening in a lady's company. With something against the ventilators on the inside, and that thick teak door closed, not a glimmer of light could be seen outside. None of the natives had any occasion to go near the place unless to fetch and carry when the door was unlocked in the daytime. Nor, presumably, would anybody else go there at night.

As a rule, Malays don't prowl about a *kampong* much after eight in the evening—they sit on the pole-verandas of their raised nipa-shacks or the usual big community-house until they get sleepy—singing, chatting, strumming native instruments a bit. Even the young fellows and girls pick out some dark corner above the ground for their spooning rather than risk stepping upon a snake, centipede or scorpion in the dark. And they don't prowl about in the jungle at night as much as the story-writers would have us believe. If the girl strolled out to that storage-cellar after dark and Cadbury followed a few minutes afterward, ostensibly smoking his pipe and getting a bit of exercise, the chances are that none of the Dyaks followed or saw them go into the place—there was no reason why they should—it was the Tuan's business, not theirs. If the Memsahib went out around the *kampong* in her breeches and leather puttees, it was no more than she did many a time either for exercise or to see some of the Dyaks who were sick—to assist at the birth of a baby if need be.

In two of the huts nearest the storage-cellar—perhaps three hundred feet, with thick jungle-bush between—some of them thought they heard two or three pistol-shots from that direction one night, soon after the rats were caught in the pit—echoes so faint that the shots, if there were any, might have been fired at some animal further in the jungle. They were by no means sure that they even heard shots. But from that time, the door of the storage-cellar had been padlocked and none of them had seen the inside of it. Had anybody asked them if the remaining five barrels of lime had been emptied over something in the pit and the earth shoveled in on top of it, they had no knowledge or inference upon which to base a reply. The Memsahib might have done such a thing in the Tuan's absence—but nobody had seen her anywhere near the place. The only points they could agree upon as to any approximate date were that the Tuan had not returned to the station since about that time—nor had the girl been seen. To the best of their recollection, her mother and sisters had left the *kampong* a week or so later, as if to join her in some other place.

Although cross-questioned several times by Galt and Walthorpe, Ling Foh's account of what he had picked up from the Dyaks didn't vary by so much as a word. That was the story—all they seemed to know—not a scrap of further evidence one way or another. But there was an inference, Ling Foh thought, that the Memsahib might have attended to a certain personal matter exactly as every Malay would attend to it—and by so doing had earned both vastly increased respect and a good bit of wholesome fear. A Memsahib who attended to her affairs in the Oriental way rather than that usually observed among the "Clistian whites" was one to be placated—not angered needlessly. She saw with the Asiatic eye, and all things were known to her, according to the Dyaks.

WHILE they were still pumping Ling Foh for more definite evidence of what might have occurred, there was a sudden chorus of excited voices outside, as a number of Dyaks rushed by—and when the men hurried out upon the veranda, a

bright glow at the further end of the *kampong,* with occasional flame streaking above the jungle bush showed that some hut was on fire—the jungle-growth being too damp and too green to burn. Running along after the others, they made their way through the fringe of bush and saw that it was the thick roof of the storage-cellar which was burning — a three-foot mass of solid nipa-thatch, dry as tinder on the under side. In a few moments, the blazing roof-timbers crashed down into the cellar, carrying with them the glowing mass of thatch which soon consumed the door and every inflammable thing which had been in the cellar—the embers smoked for two or three days.

As the two scientists walked back down the *kampong,* they saw Lady Gwen and Alice Farquhar on the veranda of the station-bungalow, watching the glow of the fire.

"Aren't you enough of the average person, Lady Gwen, to enjoy running to a fire?"

"Oh, I started up the *kampong* after Alice called me—but I saw where the fire was and knew there was little risk of its spreading this way with the wind as it is—and came back. Just as well that cellar is gone—the fire will purify it."

Later, Galt asked the girl if her aunt had been with her the whole evening.

"Why—yes. Until she went back to her room for something. I was reading the *Illustrated News* — and called her, after running out to see what all the commotion was about."

The Doctor glanced at Walthorpe—who nodded slightly. There had been just about time enough, they both knew—but it was pure surmise, and Miss Farquhar's testimoney would have made it seem ridiculous. After all — what difference did it make? Suppose they took some opportunity when Lady Gwen was up conferring with the Sultan, to dig down among the ashes and debris of that cellar—found the rat-pit filled in—dug into that until they struck lime. . . . . A gruesome job—one which none of the Dyaks would touch—in fact none of them would go within two hundred feet of the place if he could avoid it. What would it prove? Coming right down to cold fact, what did they want to prove? It would be purely circumstantial at best—and not so much of the circumstantial at that.

Next day, Galt went out into the jungle with Walthorpe—taking his camera and a couple of film-packs to photograph certain plants before they wilted, after uprooting, if he could find them. And upon their return, he asked Lady Gwen if there were any developing-chemicals or printing-frames at the station.

"Why—yes. Cadbury uses his camera a lot when he's here—generally darkens the kitchen windows and develops his plates in there."

"That's luck! I think I can rig up a better dark-room over at the guest-bungalow, and we'll not be so likely to have anyone barging in upon us, there. If you'll show me the chemicals, printing-paper and frames, I'll take them over."

"Certainly! Come into Cadbury's study with me. I don't venture in there when he's away because he rows so about his things being disturbed—but he'd wish you to use the chemicals, of course. By the way, I fancy he hadn't developed the last pack of films in his adapter when he left. Could you be sure of not spoiling them if you developed that pack with yours?"

"Just as sure as I would be of my own, and I've done quite a lot of it. I see you have a nickeled tank—that simplifies the developing a lot. And his packs are the same size as mine. Wonder if you'd let me borrow or buy a couple of packs? You seem to have two or three dozen, and it looks as though I may need more than I fetched along."

"As many as you wish, Doctor. All I know about photography is 'pressing the button' and having some dealer 'do the rest'—so I'm not likely to use many of those packs myself."

THE Doctor and Walthorpe put in a whole evening in their dark-room when they had rigged it up—with results they hadn't anticipated. The Doctor's plants came out beautifully — perfect exposures against a background of black velvet which he had carried with him and propped up on twigs behind them. But when they took Cadbury's exposures out of the tank they again sensed the impression of ghostly, clammy forms peering over their shoulders in the dark-room, lighted only by the small red incandescent bulb. The exposures appeared to have been perfectly timed—presumably the man was an artist with ideas of feminine beauty which he wished to bring out, and his model had held the poses without moving. The girl was nude

—posed in eight different positions, some of them quite graceful, against a dark-green ivory palm shrub for background. The remaining four films were of Cadbury himself—and the girl was handsome enough as to leave no question as to her identity.

As they looked at the prints, Walthorpe asked:

"What the deuce are you going to do with 'em? Hand 'em over to Lady Gwen? I *don't* think!"

"No—I'm going to run one of these fresh packs through the developer until every bit of the emulsion is eaten off and then hand her the clear films—say they evidently weren't exposed at all. But—well—dammit all, Walthorpe, do you suppose she knew what these exposures undoubtedly were, and—er—and wanted them to be a sort of 'Exhibit A,' as an excuse for anything which might have happened? Gosh! These negatives pin it on Cadbury without a shadow of doubt! Here's what the fellow was—with his own charming wife right in the same house with 'em! If he'd been all alone in an out-station for two or three years—time enough to forget wife and civilization—one might let it go with the knowledge that it's done by a good half the chaps who come out to such places. But I swear this was raw enough to condone pretty nearly anything! Consider her pride of race—and the smirch this was upon her!"

"H-m-m—what about Alice Farquhar? How is the best way to handle that end of it? I met her three years ago in London—an' now she's got me so I find it difficult to maintain the scientific point of view when she's around. Women are a sort of disturbin' influence—aren't they? What are you goin' to tell Alice—what will you do with her?"

"Take her back to Singapore after another week or so, and a few days up with the Sultan. She'll go! This whole District terrifies her more and more every day. She knows all the Dyaks believe the place is haunted, and it's getting her nerve. If there were such things as ghosts, they sure would stick around this *kampong* and drive the whole outfit crazy! How Lady Gwen keeps her nerve so magnificently is something new in my professional experience—I've never seen anything like it! And if she doesn't weaken, I'll say she can't have done what we know damned well she must have done! My hat's off to her! Great suffering cats! . . . . Consider, will you? The punishment actually thought out as far back as when those six barrels of lime were ordered from Singapore! . . . . Planned to go through without a single hitch! We may condemn the 'unwritten law' as much as we please in what we consider civilized places—but it sure goes in Asia! It's in the very atmosphere out here!"

"What'll you tell the Governor—at Singapore?"

"Tell him Cadbury disappeared in the jungle with a handsome Dyak wench and is either dead or gone native—certainly will never turn up again among civilized people."

"Well—I fancy he wont, you know! An' that leaves the Memsahib — where? What becomes of *her?*"

"That's something she'll attend to herself—and it'll be a good clean job. She can be more valuable to the Straits Government right here than anyone else they could send. If, eventually, there's a race-revolution in Asia, she'll come out of it a Ranee or a Begum."

ALICE FARQUHAR wanted desperately to get away from that gruesome station—out of Borneo—and never see it again. The nameless dread she sensed from every direction was running her into a nervous breakdown. But she also felt as if she couldn't go back to Singapore without her aunt. After another week, it came to a show-down at dinner, one evening—when Lady Gwen said:

"You must go down the river tomorrow, Alice—and catch the supply-boat. There's something about this climate or the neighborhood which doesn't agree with you, just as I feared—you'll be a helpless invalid on my hands if you stay. Really, you know—I've enough on my mind without that!"

"But—when will you come out, Aunt Gwen?"

"That's very indefinite. I'm needed here in various ways. In fact, I doubt if another manager would stay in the place a fortn't. Perhaps some day I'll go back to England—perhaps not. Who knows?"

The last they saw of her was a graceful figure in breeches and sun-helmet on the river-bank—waving good-by to them with a spotless handkerchief. Looking around at Ling Foh, they saw him kow-towing to her on his hands and knees—as he burned a stick of punk to his joss and murmured: "She velly Numbel One Memsahib!"

Bud La Mar riding a bad horse at a recent rodeo.

A Game of Tags

By BUD LA MAR

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

A joyous comedy of the bronco-busters, told by the professional rodeo rider who gave us "Scandalous Bill to the Reskue" and many other amusing stories.

MR. "WILD CAT" HENESSY,
Akenpane Hospital, La Junta, Colo.

Picacho, N. M., July, 1927.

Dere Frend:

I am thinkin at this date that you must be expektin a letter from yore ole pard Goshen Dick, and in order you are not disappointed I am now writin this. Now, Wild Cat, after readin the *Billboard* and not sein my name on the entry list of the Monte Vista Stampeede I woodent be sprized to learn that you are wondrin where in hell I went and sashade to. Well it is this way. You know, Wild Cat, them big contests is tuff plases to win any money at on akount of so much kompetishon, and the horses they use is sometimes liabul to buck a feller off.

So by axident I found out there was gonna be a Rodeo put on here in Picacho and I got me a prize list and a led pensil and figered that by winnin 2 first day moneys and first in the finals I wood have four hundred dollars ($400) which will be enuff to take you outa the hospital and is more than what I cood win at Monte Vista and of course I aint win it yit, but with all the hands driftin north to the big shows I will have the field to myself aginst a lot of pore spur jinglers that think all you gotta do to win a contest is to ride yore bronks strate up which is only a part of it, as you and me has found out. Brane

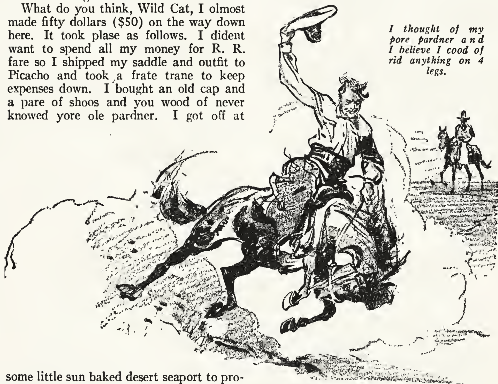
work is what it takes aint it the trooth, Wild Cat? Haw Haw.

Since I have left you layin there in yore kot at the hospital with a broke leg and maybe somethin else broke which the docs dident know yit the thoughts of you has allus been upermost in my mind. Speshly the idee that I got to make enuff money to pay the docs so as to git you out aniway before spring. Of course I told you not to try to ride that Bufalo bull but you shood git on him regardless, and if you got flung 30 feet it was yore own fault; but I will not fergit that you got me outa jale in Midville for bulldoggin the farmers milk cow in the tomato patch, and I will pay yore way outa that hospital. But I have a feelin this is gonna cost a dum site more.

What do you think, Wild Cat, I olmost made fifty dollars ($50) on the way down here. It took plase as follows. I dident want to spend all my money for R. R. fare so I shipped my saddle and outfit to Picacho and took a frate trane to keep expenses down. I bought an old cap and a pare of shoos and you wood of never knowed yore ole pardner. I got off at some little sun baked desert seaport to promote a few vittles, and while I was disposin of some ham and eggs I overheard a coupla fellers talkin about an outlaw horse. To hear them tell it that bronk was a raw meat eater from Powder River. Now you know, Wild Cat, there is allus a chance for a bronk rider to pick up a $ here and there ridin some fuztale which folks have an idea he is a sekond Steamboat. Come to find out, he coodent maybe buck off a wet saddle blankit.

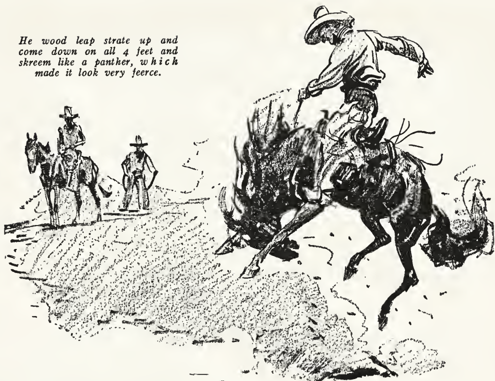
Me bein dressed up like a tramp, I figered they wood not suspishon I cood ride so I approached them and asked them how much they wood pay to have the horse rid. The spindle legged one which was the *hombre* that owned the horse sade that if I rid him he wood give fifty dollars ($50) so I sade quick run him out mister. Did you ever ride a bronk, says the tall feller, and I says no but for fifty dollars I will ride a stripped legged whoozit with a keg of danamite in each hand.

They sade wait here we will go and fetch him, and they walked out nudgin each other and laffin. They led the horse to the stockyards, and in a few minutes the hole town was there to see this rip-snorter stomp on me. I borowed a saddle and a pare of boots and some spurs and stepped in the middle of him, and what do you spose, Wild Cat, first thing I knew I was on the ground in a sittin posishon. And so I dident git the fifty dollars but instead a terrible headache caused from sittin down so hard and sudden.



I thought of my pore pardner and I believe I cood of rid anything on 4 legs.

It is a good thing I am the kind of a cowboy that allus looks on brite sides of life and instead of gittin mad like you wooda done, I figered I was lucky nobody



He wood leap strate up and come down on all 4 feet and skreem like a panther, which made it look very feerce.

knew who I was and so by gittin bucked off I dident do somethin unusual.

Well, here I am in Picacho watin for the show which starts tomorrow. I pade my entrence fees and drawed my mount for the first day and his name is No. 12 or maybe it is a mare. I do not know. These horses are not regular buckin stock. They are just wild ponies rounded up for this festival. So I shood not have no trouble winnin on just common fuztales and there is nobody here to ride only local boys.

Now, Wild Cat, if I was you I woodent be worryin myself over the outcome of this contest. It is bad enuff you are in bed with a broke leg in a large hospital full of docs and nurses as even if some of the nurses are very stunnin lookers I am shore you cood not care for one on akount of the medecine smell which is very disgustin. Do not be skared I will be bucked off as you know that a cowboy which has rid bronks like Misery Mike and Peaceful Henry cood not fall off a horse named No. 12.

Korjaly and sinsarly yores,
Goshen Dick.

The next day.

DERE Frend:

Well, Wild Cat, the first day of the show has come to end and I now write and tell you in detales all the important happenins that took plase to date as I know you are ankshusly awaitin news from yore ole pard which is tryin hard to make enuff money to pay yore way outa the hospital.

This No. 12 bronk which I rid today turned out to be very disappointin, just like I expected. I watched a few of the boys ride before it come my turn, and Wild Cat, you shooda been here. It was terrible.

These wild horses put up an awful fight in the chute when the saddle is put on them, but when they are turned out, all they think about is to run away. Once in a while one will make a coupla jumps, but nothin serious. So I sade to myself, Dick, you canot win this contest unless you ride a buckin horse, and so I found a peace of string and after cinchin my saddle on No. 12, I tied this string around his flanks good and snug, and you know, Wild Cat, a flank rope to a horse is like a fuze to a stick of danamite.

One of the judges come to the chute to see me git mounted and seen me fixin my persooader. He saze "Hay, what are you doin?" And I answers, "Mister, this here string is very dear and precious to me, and I thought that to keep from loosin it I wood tie it on behind." He saze, "Don't git funny—I know a flank rope when I see one." And I snaps back at him: "What

is this, a reeprodukshon of the Pony Express or a buckin contest? I do not want people to think I am goin after the male!"

WELL, they opened the gate and No. 12 lade back his ears and took 3 long runnin jumps. Then he give a snort and swallowed his head, and I hit him in the neck with both spurs, and he went to buckin only very mild like. He wood leap strate up and come down on all 4 feet and skreem like a panther, which made it look very feerce. But he was not hard to ride, and I win 3d money on him on akount 2 other bronks bucked harder than mine did.

There was one horse realy turned handsprings, and the boy that rid him took first money. He is a big sorrel with a roman nose and very fast and crooked. His name is No. 8. They have the numbers wired in the horses tales to tell them apart.

Now, Wild Cat, in order to win first here I wood have to draw that pony and put up a good ride on him which I am shore I can do it only I did not draw No. 8, but instead No. 3, a pore little dun horse that coodent buck hard enuff to keep warm in the summer time. And so it looks like, Wild Cat, you will have to stay in that hospital awhile longer. But you shood consider yoreself lucky layin there in bed with nurses runnin hither and yon at yore beck and call while yore ole pardner Goshen Dick is workin himself to death payin for the fool thing you did tryin to ride a Bufalo bull and gittin flung 40 feet. Anyway, I win $40 dollars today, and I am sendin you some tobako to help you pass the time away.

Korjaly and sinsarly yores,

Goshen Dick.

P. S.: What do you spose, Wild Cat? Sittin here, a brite idea come to me all of a sudden. I will not tell you yit, but do not git worrid. I have thunk up a skeeme.

The evenin of the next day

DERE Frend:

Haw, haw! I cannot stop laffin. Wild Cat, it is too funny for words the way I put it over these fellers today and win one hundred dollars ($100). You know I told you that I drew a little dun pony I coodent win a dime on only if every body got bucked off but me. Well, just before the show started, I walked around the corrals innocent like, and pretty soon I come to a long chute where about 10 head of horses was shut in. I walked up and down for a minute wislin and lookin up in the air so as to appear unkonsarned. Then I located No. 3 and leaned against the chute and rolled a smoke. Then I took a coupla puffs and reached my hand between the planks and unwired the tag outa the horses tale and put it in my chap pockit.

Then I took a coupla more puffs on my cigarette and sneaked back a ways to where the big sorrel horse No. 8 was. I started to pull the tag from his tale, and he give a big snort and kicked at the horse behind him. Some fellers come runnin yellin, "Hay, what is wrong?" And I hollered, "Whoa, you big raskal, you stand still!" And I grabbed a pole and started pokin with it with 1 hand while I was swapin tags with the other hand.

"There," I saze, "you will try to git loose, will you! It is a good thing I happened to be here, boys, or he wooda tore the chute down."

Pretty soon the boys went back to the krap game and I stuck the tag marked No. 8 in the little dun jackrabbits tale. So you see, Wild Cat, No. 3 was not No. 3 at all, but instead No. 8. And No. 8 had become No. 3. I hope you understand all this, Wild Cat. It is very important, and I have tried to make it plane to you. I bet you will be sprized on akount you never seemed to realize yore pardner was smart.

When the little horse was shoved between the swingin gates, the Arena Direkter yelled: "Hay, where is the feller that drew No. 8? Hurry up—git ready! Hay, where the hell is that *hombre?*"

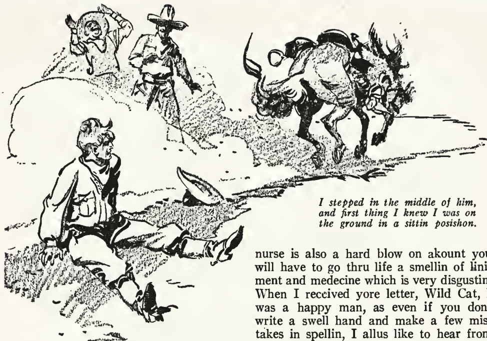
A little short bowlegged feller jumped up from where he was sittin and sade: "I drew No. 8, but that is not him."

"Are you akuesin me of bein blind?" saze the A. D. "If you drew No. 8, there he is, and if you dont want him, I will turn him out."

The short bowlegged feller looked around sprized and started arguin, but the A. D. bawled him out some more for bein so slow and holdin up the show, and so he got his saddle and throo it over the chute and went to cinchin it, mumblin and cussin to himself.

Well, Wild Cat, I figger I did that feller a favor on akount I do not think he wooda rid the sorrel horse, as No. 8 only done a coupla sashays, and he throo away his rein and went for leather.

When No. 3 was drove in the chute, you can be shore I was ready and I did not



I stepped in the middle of him, and first thing I knew I was on the ground in a sittin posishon.

use my flank rope as I did not think this bronk wood need coaxin which proved to be a good idea, as he was very ruff and give me some trouble stayin on top of him. The crowd whooped. "Ride him, cowboy —ride him, cowboy, ride him!" And I thought of my pore pardner with a broke leg and nurses all around him and a very disgustin smell of medecine, and I believe I cood of rid anything on 4 legs. And that is the way I win first money today.

I am sendin you one hundred twenty-five dollars ($125) and I know you will be glad to git outa that hospital and you can go to Chicago and wait for me there. I will be there for the show. I think I can win enuff tomorow in the finals to pay my R. R. fare.

Haw, haw! Wild Cat, I am still laffin, and I spose you are too at this date. Yore ole pard Goshen Dick is a feller with branes. Anyway you dont catch me ridin a Bufalo bull and gettin flung 50 feet.

Korjaly and sinsarly yores,
Goshen Dick.

MR. "WILD CAT" HENESSY,
Lovenest Bungalow, La Junta, Colo.
(After receivin yore letter)

Dere Sir:

Wild Cat, I am still all broke up and sad, and also I think it was a very low down trick for you to git marrid on the money I sent you to git out of the hospital on. And that you shood have marrid a nurse is also a hard blow on akount you will have to go thru life a smellin of liniment and medecine which is very disgustin. When I received yore letter, Wild Cat, I was a happy man, as even if you dont write a swell hand and make a few mistakes in spellin, I allus like to hear from you when we have become seprated by cercomstanses. And now after all these years together, you have went and forsaked yore ole pardner and marrid a nurse. I tell you I broke down and cried, I am that sorry for you, Wild Cat.

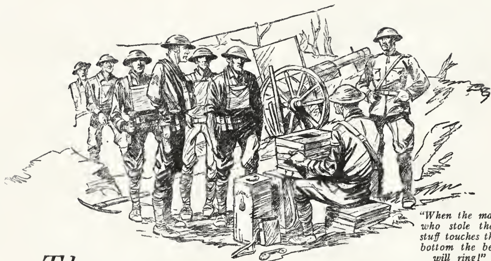
To think that you have took to raisin chickens is also a great sprize. I wish I cood see you with a pan of corn under yore arm yellin: "Chick chick chick!" Sech an occupashon for a bronk rider! You grate big ruffneck, you! Yellin chick chick chick! Haw, haw, I cood die laffin.

Well, come to think of it, a feller that wood try to ride a Bufalo bull and git flung 60 feet is just the kind that will go out and git marrid to a nurse. I dont spose you thought any more of it. But you will find out, Wild Cat, that gettin marrid to a nurse is somethin worse than a broke leg. But in the years to come, dont expect to come to me yore faithful pardner and say: "Dick, what shood I do now?" I have had no matrimony experience and will not be able to advise you.

I am sorry our pardnership has come to sech fateful endin, and I spose it is good by to our plans of havin a little ranch somewhere in the mountains, but when I will be about to brake out in tears, I will think about you yellin chick chick chick, with a clothes pin over yore nose to keep out the medecine smell.

Good by, Wild Cat.

Korjaly and sinsarly yores,
Goshen Dick.



"When the man who stole that stuff touches the bottom the bell will ring!"

The *Guilty Hand*

By GORDON E. WARNKE

A war-time comedy wherein a matter of missing chocolate becomes a serious affair—with a dramatic and unexpected climax.

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

MICKY EGAN flopped down on the ground back of Number One gun and reached for his roll. Sliding a greasy hand under the shelter half, he felt around absent-mindedly. Not finding what he was seeking, he turned his entire attention to pulling off the shelter half and rummaging in the blankets. Still the object did not come to light. He rose hastily and shook each blanket separately, and scattered the toilet articles. He stared at the olive-drab coverings for a moment, and then his eyes sought the figure of his buddy, Shrimp Bonito. His fixed gaze was full of anger as he dropped the blankets and stepped over to where the little Italian was greasing shells.

"Gimme my chocolate," growled Micky.

"Give you what?" asked the surprised Shrimp, looking up.

"You heard me. Gimme my chocolate."

"Your chocolate? Say, what's eatin' you? I aint got your damn' chocolate." And he resumed his task.

Egan dug a toe in the other's ribs.

"Come on, cough up," he warned, "before I take a round outta you."

Shrimp looked up again. "Any time you want to start, go ahead, you big Irish burglar."

Then, seeing his friend was really in earnest, the Italian, ex-cultured waiter, erstwhile private, Battery C, 420th Field Artillery, rose to his feet and faced the angry Irishman. "Before you fly off the handle, let's find out what the trouble is."

"You know darn well what it is," snapped Micky. "I had three bars o' chocolate in my roll, and when I went to get one just now, they were all gone. And three packages of cigarettes, too. You were the only guy who knew I had them."

"You sure?"

"Certainly. Didn't you see me shake out the blankets?"

"I mean, are you sure that I was the only one who knew you had them? You know you were chewing on one of those chocolate bars in front of some of the other men yesterday."

Micky looked thoughtful. "Guess you're right," he agreed. Then he shot a suspicious glance at his partner. "You sure you don't know anything about them?"

Shrimp laughed. "No, I don't."

THE Irishman started to gather up his blankets, when Jim Burton, corporal of Number One Gun, walked up to them.

"Any o' you guys seen my wrist-watch?"

"No," snapped Micky, still worried about his own loss. "Have you seen my chocolate?"

"Don't know anything about your chocolate, but somebody walked away with my wrist-watch. Left it on the seat of the gun and was gone about half a minute. When I came back it was missing."

Shrimp shook his head thoughtfully. "There's something funny about all this!"

Micky snorted in disgust.

"If you think there's anything funny about losing three bars of chocolate and three packages of cigarettes, you got another think coming!"

"I don't mean that losing the stuff is funny. I mean that it is queer that three or four of the fellows have lost money and other things in the last few days."

Corporal Burton scratched his head. "This begins to sound interesting. Who are the men who lost things?"

Shrimp started to count them off on his fingers.

"There was Joe Watson lost ten francs. Bill Lessing is shy twelve. Jack Billings lost a carton of cigarettes that he packed clear from St. Gilles. Bill Wenn lost his safety razor, and Red Tenny is looking for a pair of German field-glasses that somebody hooked on him."

Micky whistled. "Gee, that's a lot of stuff to lose in a few days! Say!" he suddenly ejaculated. "All those men are on either Number One or Number Two guns."

"Well, I'll speak to the captain about it," offered Burton. Without waiting for a reply, he started for the pill-box that the C. O. was using for a dugout. Micky tagged along at his heels. At the entrance to the dugout the captain was sweating over some firing data, and he looked up in an irritated manner at the interruption.

"Well," he asked, answering their salutes, "what now?"

"There is some thieving going on in the outfit, sir," said Burton.

"There's what? In my outfit? Who is it? Bring him here."

"We can't, sir. We don't know who it is. Several of the men have lost money, and others have had cigarettes and personal articles stolen."

"How long has this been going on?"

"Two or three days, sir."

"If I might offer a suggestion, sir," interrupted Micky, "I noticed that all the men who lost anything were members of either Number One or Number Two gun-crews. Those two crews have their fox-holes in a group to the right of Number One gun, and I think it must be one of them."

"Very good suggestion, Egan. What do you think we ought to do about it?"

Micky swelled visibly. "I've got an idea," he said importantly. "I think you ought to get the two crews together and tell them that you'll give the man who took those things until tomorrow morning at daylight to put them on the trail of the gun."

"And if he doesn't?"

"Well,"—and the Irishman grinned,—"then I think I've got a way of finding out who the guy is."

The C. O. answered the infectious grin. "Give him a chance at it, Corporal," he said to Burton. "Get the two gun-crews together immediately, and I'll be out to speak to them."

AS Burton rounded up the men who made up the two gun-crews there was much discussion as to what it was all about.

"Betcha they're going to pull a sacrifice gun on us."

"Naw, they're going to pay us off and tell us to go home," said a second, sarcastically.

"Might be a tobacco issue," offered a third hopefully.

Simpkins, sergeant of the first section, stepped forward.

"Fa-a-all *in.*"

There was a hasty shuffling of feet and an undertone of profanity as the men shoved and bumped their way into alignment and finally stood quiet.

The sergeant kept them at attention until the C. O. came from his dugout. When the latter stepped in front of the line he surveyed it belligerently.

"There's some man in these two crews that has been stealing from some of the other men. He's taken money, cigarettes and personal articles."

"And chocolate," interrupted Micky in a husky whisper, from his place in ranks.

"Shut up!" ordered the C. O. "You men are at attention; if there's any talking to do, I'll do it. This man who is

doing the stealing will be given until tomorrow at daylight to return the stuff. There's no firing tonight, and the only one that'll be permitted around the guns is the guard. He'll have orders to stick to Number Four gun as if he's glued there. That'll give the man who took the stuff a chance to return it by placing it on the trail of Number One gun. If it isn't there by daylight tomorrow—he'll be court-martialed. Fall out."

When the men had fallen out, Sergeant Simpkins called Micky to one side.

"Suppose," said the sergeant, "that tomorrow noon the trail of that gun is as clear as it is now. What then?"

"That's what the captain asked me," said Egan. "Wait and see."

FROM that moment until dark everybody regarded everybody else with suspicion. The crews from Number Three and Number Four guns were enjoying themselves immensely. They jeered the crews under suspicion, and a number of fights were narrowly averted. When darkness had fallen, there was a tendency on the part of most of the men to hang around the trail of Number One gun, but the guard saw to it that they kept their distance, at least far enough away so that they could not see the gun through the darkness.

The position was quiet that evening. The battery did no firing, and only a few stray shells floated over the position, to burst with a dismal *"whang"* far back of the lines. When morning came, the men's first actions were to look in the direction of Number One gun. When it became light enough to make out objects clearly, it was seen that the trail of the gun was as bare as it had been the night before. The captain was as interested as the rest of the battery, and when he saw that none of the stolen stuff had been returned, he called Egan to his dugout.

"What have you got to say now, Egan?"

Micky grinned. "I didn't think that would work," he said.

"Then what the devil did you want us to try it for?" snapped the captain.

"Because I wanted to give the guy a chance. Now I'll go get him. I'm going down to the kitchen for a minute to get my apparatus. When I get back I'll find him."

As Micky saluted and turned away, the captain shook his head. The Irishman was a likable little fellow, but the C. O. was not sure whether or not he was doing the right thing in letting him handle this alone. Deciding to see it through, however, he called in Sergeant Simpkins.

"Fall in those two gun-crews. Egan claims he has a way of picking out the guilty man, and we'll give him a chance at it. He'll be back in a minute."

The sergeant saluted, and as he appeared in the open to blow his whistle, men came running from all directions. It appeared that they had been waiting for just some such action. Simpkins decided that this was the first time the men had answered the whistle without grumbling. In fact, some of them started in his direction before he blew it. He ordered gun-crews One and Two to fall in. Amid the laughter of the rest of the battery, they nervously obeyed. They were not quite sure what to expect, and looked at each other inquiringly. The sergeant gave them "at ease" and it seemed as though a sigh ran through the group.

At this moment Micky Egan came up, a large box under his arm and a field telephone slung over one shoulder. Setting box and phone down, he dragged a couple of empty shell-boxes over in front of the assembled crews and placed the box on top of them. It was then apparent that there was a hole cut in the cover of the box about five inches square. Taking the field telephone, he placed it on the ground under the box. The two wires which projected from it he attached to two nails at one end of the box. Then he turned to face the crews, that had been watching him curiously.

"Some bird in this bunch," he announced, "has been stealing chocolate—and other stuff—and we're going to find out who it is. This box here,"—and he placed his hand on the mysterious box,—"is what is called a thief-catcher. I borrowed it from a friend of mine in the signal corps. They've used it lots of times, and—it never fails."

The assembled men looked at each other nervously.

"You don't need to be afraid," continued Micky, "if you didn't steal any of this stuff. But if you're guilty, this box will say so. You're going to pass this box one at a time. As each of you pass it, you'll put your hand through the hole in the cover and press against the bottom. If you're not guilty, nothing will happen.

If you're guilty—*the bell on the phone will ring.*"

As Micky talked, the men of the battery dropped their levity and leaned forward interestedly. The captain also was listening to every word. At this point he started to interrupt, but an almost imperceptible shake of Micky's head stopped him.

"Remember," cautioned the little Irishman. "When most of you touch the bottom of the machine, nothing will happen. But when the man who stole that stuff touches the bottom—*the bell will ring.* Squad, 'ten*shun.* Right *face.* Forward, column left, *march.*"

AS the men filed slowly up to the box, the other members of the battery maintained a hushed silence. Some one in the rear coughed nervously. Micky had made the procedure very dramatic, and it had had its effect on his listeners. The first man placed his hand in the box, pausing for a moment as he pressed against the bottom. Then he withdrew it, and with a self-conscious grin he walked quickly over to join the watchers. Egan stopped him and made him fall in again in his original place.

The next man did the same, followed quickly by each one of the group. As fast as they left the box, Egan ordered them to form on the left of the first man. The last man to reach the box hesitated for a moment. The bell had not rung yet. Swallowing quickly, he plunged his hand into the hole and was seen to press down hard on the bottom. Nothing happened. Jerking forth his hand, he almost ran to his position in line.

Both crews had passed the box without the bell ringing! As the members of the battery realized this there was a curious murmur arose. The captain stepped forward uncertainly, but again Micky shook his head slightly. Turning to the men of the battery he held up his hand.

"Just a minute," he called. "I'm not through, yet."

Turning back to the group in front of him, he asked, "Those of you who still claim they did not steal the stuff that's been missing, hold up your right hand."

Every hand in the group went up. Micky's eyes flashed down the line.

"Hands down," he ordered. "Jenkins, step forward."

A thin, sallow youth in Number One gun-crew stepped forward one pace, his eyes flitting nervously from Micky to the captain, to the battery and finally to the ground.

Egan turned to face the captain. Pointing a dramatic finger at Jenkins, the little Irishman announced: "Captain, there's the thief."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when Jenkins made a dash for the road beyond the guns. There were several men of the battery closer to the road, however, and they stopped him short.

"Sergeant," said the C. O., "search that man's pack."

No one spoke as Simpkins walked over to the foxholes at the rear of Number One gun and examined the packs lying there. In a moment he came to one on which was inscribed the name of Jenkins, followed by his equipment number. With reckless fingers he tore open the pack. Toilet articles fell out on the ground and socks tumbled after. In the center of the pack he came upon a cloth bag. Pulling open the strings at the top, he turned it upside down. Out tumbled cigarettes, chocolate, wrist-watch and several other things that the men in the battery had missed of late.

The captain had seen enough.

"Sergeant, put that man under arrest and take him back to the regimental P. C. I'll make a written report this afternoon. Egan, I want to see you."

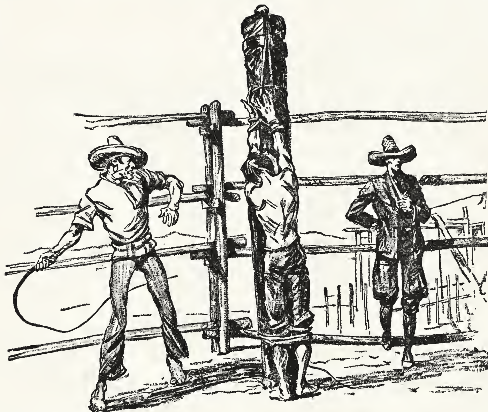
MICKY followed the captain to his pill-box dugout, a faint grin on his face. When the captain turned to him, he tried to sober, but he was so well pleased with himself that he could not wipe the grin from his face.

"Well, Egan," said the C. O., "you did it, all right. Now tell me how. I know that the box was a lot of bull, so how did you know who the right man was?"

"You may not think so, Captain, but it was the box that did it. If you were guilty and you thought that by touching the bottom of the box it would make a bell ring, what would you do?"

The captain laughed shortly. "I wouldn't touch the bottom of the box," he answered

"That's just what Jenkins figured." grinned Micky. "There was soot all over the bottom of that box, and when I asked the men to hold up their right hands, every one had soot on his hand—except Jenkins!"



Forgotten Country

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

THE ten-forty-five train that morning brought a lean, sunburned young man into Los Angeles. He came out through the tunnel from the tracks and stood blinking in the yellow sunlight and swift-moving crowd before the station's central entrance, tilting a wide-brimmed soft hat down a bit farther over his eyes and grinning at nothing in particular, as though he were on smiling terms with the world in general. He hesitated there in the crowd a moment, then caught the attention of a taxi-driver nosing his car along the curb, put his single bag in and gave an address from a crumpled telegram.

The taxi shot rapidly up Sixth and swung onto Spring Street. Fifteen minutes after he had left the train, Jim Haverley was shaking Colonel Wheaton's hand.

"You got my telegram?" Wheaton asked, a first greeting between friends over.

"Yes, Colonel—on the train this morning. I came direct."

"What are your plans now, Jim?"

Jim Haverley smiled.

"That's a large question, Colonel," he answered leisurely. "I've had four years straight of the Bar Triangle, you know; and now that I've sold that out, I reckon I'm going to enjoy city life for a time. I haven't figured past that."

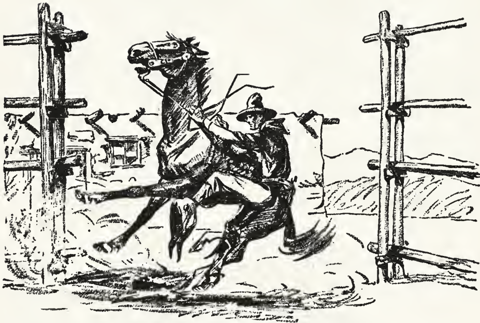
Wheaton looked at the wall and shook his head. "No, Jim. Twenty-four hours; that's your limit here for the present. I've got a job for you."

Jim Haverley laughed again.

"You're handing out the law pretty stiff, Colonel." He paused, eying the older man. "What's in the wind?" he asked.

"I want you to be in to the Rancho Ardillero by tomorrow night," Wheaton launched out directly. "Then if I buy the other half of the place, I want you to stay there and manage it. . . . . Jim, you can't retire just because you sold the Bar Triangle and made a profit."

Haverley drew the pony to a sliding halt. . . . . His blood suddenly seethed; afterward he had no recollection of dismounting and leaping in through the gate.



By ROLLIN BROWN

The old West comes into sharp conflict with the new, in this thrill-crammed novelette by the author of "An Act of Justice" and other good ones.

"I wasn't thinking of retiring exactly, Colonel—"

"All right. That settles it. You're the man for the job. You've had to learn enough Spanish down on the Bar Triangle, I know, to give you an understanding of the language—if you happen to need to use it. Now let's get down to business."

HE overrode a word from Haverley with a wave of his hand.

"It's this way, Jim: Back five years ago I bought the first of an adjoining series of land sections from a Spanish-Californian named Lugo Ardillero. The land is good—mountain range, fair grass, plenty of water for stock. I've been over the whole place. Section by section this Lugo Ardillero has sold it off, until I now own the west half of the *rancho*—title from his father, Santiago José, and dating from the original Mexican grant to the Ardilleros in 1842. A good investment, I figure, although the land is too rough ever to be more than range. I can make a profit by holding it awhile, and that's what I plan on.

"Well, to come to the point, Jim: Lugo is something of a waster, and he's run through the money for the west half. Now he wants to sell me the east and the cattle in a lump. As I say, I've been over the place, and know it and the stock to be worth the money. . . . . Then yesterday, just by chance, I ran onto an old-timer I used to know—Joe Anderson, by name. He's a sheriff of the old school, and he's been up in this Ardillero country for some time recently, to say nothing of time long past.

"'You know the Ardillero grant?' Joe Anderson asked me.

"I nodded.

"'Strange about that place,' he went on. 'It's one of the few old California *ranchos* left intact. I'd say the place was just like it was forty years ago, when I first saw it—

primitive, the same old customs, unchanged, isolated on the edge of the desert as it is.'

"I agreed with him.

"'I suppose,' he said, 'it's because of old John Winton's interest that the place has never been cut up and sold. Old John, you know, was half owner in Santiago José Ardillero's time.'"

COLONEL WHEATON paused and looked squarely into Haverley's eyes.

"Do you get it, Jim?"

"You mean that this Lugo Ardillero has been selling you land that may have another claim on it?"

Wheaton shook his head.

"No, not that. But I mean he may be just about to. The west half came to Lugo by the death will of his father, Santiago José. It's clear; no chance to be wrong on it. But Lugo's claim on the east half is by direct inheritance from his mother—she died about a month ago.

"Now, let's suppose that this east half may have another deed over it, given by Santiago José to this John Winton, as Joe Anderson has the idea. You see—the deed going direct to John Winton from Santiago José, as friend to friend, no record ever having been made of it, and Lugo's mother actually being left no share in the end. That's Spanish custom, to give all to the eldest son; it's not impossible. And deeds of that kind have been given in these old transactions all fogged up with time. That John Winton once owned half the *rancho*, before his death, Joe Anderson vouches—bought it, he says, and lived with the Ardilleros until he died twenty years or so ago. I find no record of such a thing.

"Do you see? Not that I actually believe such is the case. It's just possible; that's all. And the deal is too good a buy for me to let slip on a rumor, since I already own half the place."

"What do you want me to do?" Jim Haverley asked.

"I want you to get in there and look around for me," Wheaton told him. "I can't leave, and somebody's got to check up on things in general. There's just good time for you to do it in. The deal is scheduled to go through sometime before the nineteenth."

"With a deed of that sort, I'd have little chance—" Haverley began.

"Wait," Wheaton interrupted. "If it's true, you'd have more chance than you think. Joe Anderson also tells me that the Señora Concepcion Ardillero—that's Lugo's mother, who died a month ago—had taken John Winton's baby, a girl, to raise at the father's death. The mother had died when the child was born. . . . . This girl is supposed to be living at the *rancho* now. According to Joe Anderson, the Señora brought her up as she would her own child—in the fashion of old Spanish California, secluded, private teachers, all of that, like a Spanish señorita of a half century ago. With Lugo, of course, it was different; he was a boy and got out into the world aplenty. . . . . See, Jim? You could get at the root of the thing, if there's anything in it, by questioning her."

"You never saw her when you were at the ranch?"

"No—never. If she was there, she was kept out of my sight. My trips have been hurried—only one night actually spent at the hacienda."

"She's sort of a myth, then, too?"

"Yes, in a way; Joe Anderson's the only person ever to give me a hint of her presence. I don't know; I'll leave that for you to find out. . . . . But I'll tell you this, Jim: sometime in that one night I stayed at the hacienda I woke up, and from down along the veranda of the place, somewhere, I heard the beat of a guitar. It was throbbing out into the night—soft, low, thrumming a strange minor tune I'd never heard before, or since—and some one was crooning a dancing little song to it. . . . . That somebody wasn't a man, and it wasn't an old woman, either."

CHAPTER II

JUST ahead, up the way he followed somewhere, lay the Rancho Ardillero. Jim Haverley lilted his soft sombrero to the sunset, and urged the pony he rode with a low chuckle. A creeping slow shadow had spread out now across the valley, that had narrowed, in its steep sweep up from the foothills and White Ledge, into a serried string of little mountain flats and side ravines—high country. The west, above the side ridges, had turned a pale gold close to the ragged skyline. It would blaze soon, he knew, into the flame of California sunset, and as soon it would die again into night—the soft cool night of early summer.

Jim Haverley breathed deep and felt that

it was good to be alive. He was suddenly glad to be riding again, and to have left the clamor and crowds of Los Angeles behind. Somehow, when you'd been riding long ranges, he reflected, a city got on your nerves pretty quick. Twenty-four hours. Haverley laughed to himself. He had stayed less and it had been almost enough!

Wheaton, in his swift, jerky way, had given him directions, tracing the roads on a motor map with a pudgy forefinger: "Yes, take my car. Hit northeast to here —good boulevard that far. Then swing so —see? Back in behind the ranges, hanging along the edge of the desert to that little place called White Ledge. A little over two hundred miles, all told. Get a horse at White Ledge to go on into the ranch. . . . . You'll find there's an old phone line into White Ledge, and if it's not down somewhere, you can use it to phone a telegram out to the railroad. The railroad cuts a main trunk line out across the desert from a point back a way—you'll see it from the road. They'll tick it on to me, collect. . . . . Yeah. So long, Jim; watch your step. By the way, if you do find anything wrong, be careful. . . . . Well, so long."

HAVERLEY had left Los Angeles at daylight in Wheaton's fast light car, and by early afternoon he had swung the last curve of the rutty road into White Ledge, hot white sunlight beating down on the car until exposed metal was too hot for the touch of a hand, a long slow-settling line of white dust behind and over him. At the sight of White Ledge he stopped the car. He had, in a way, expected something of a town; and he had found a dozen warped sun-dried buildings confronting him, all deserted—one of those strange ghost mining-camps of the past. Antiquated machinery was housed in the weathered frames before him; great dump heaps of white-gray ore lay ready to go into the mills, as it had waited ready through years past. At the sound of the motor's horn, a shambling old man came out from somewhere toward him.

"Yeah," the old man said in explanation, "she war a great camp when she war a-goin'. Borax ore. Five hundred men in the shifts. Now she's dead, because richer deposits have been found other places. The company jist keeps me here as a sort of caretaker, maybe to open up again some time."

The old man, hesitant, finally rented Haverley the single horse he kept, and roughly pointed out the way.

"Rancho Ardillero, huh? Wall, you'll find they's two ways to git into it—one, 'cross the hills, direct; the other, by the Pinto Cañon road an' then across. Feller named Jeff Gydon up thar in the Pinto who is a kind of a friend of Lugo's, and might go over with you."

Haverley had chosen the more direct route.

"I wonder if a Miss Winton still lives up at the ranch?" he asked as he mounted.

The old caretaker stared at him a moment.

"She might," he said shortly, and turned away before he could be questioned further.

NOW Haverley measured the red creeping into the sunset, and chuckled again to the pony. There was a curious sense of age to this country—White Ledge, behind him, deserted, bleached, dry, phantomlike. The desert, lying out there to the east and south, stretching its flat wastes on until the land and sky met somewhere in an indistinguishable horizon, was to blame, he decided. The desert is always old, and it ages all it touches. The sense of age, that somehow it was all something out of the past, had continued up the way he had come—up through the foothills and into the long high valley, where shimmering little grass flats opened up before him, and the scrub manzanita and mesquite brush of the foothills was replaced by a growth of piñon on the ridges. Age: it was strange to Haverley after the raw, new ranches he had known down by the Bar Triangle.

The sky streaked reds and yellows up to the meridian. On a bit farther, Haverley found his way barred by the gate of a crude rail fence. Again, here, was the age, the past, that seemed to cling to everything; only here in a more definite form, like White Ledge. He dismounted and took down the bars. They were smooth and worn. The fence, split from cañon oak, was half decayed now, he saw, slowly rotting away. Patches of brittle green poison ivy vined up through the rails; down beyond, a buckeye tree lifted its trunk from the line.

He set the bars in place, and turned on into the faint winding ruts of a wagon road. Past the point of a ridge beyond, the road swung, and up in an opening flat mouth of a side ravine the hacienda

of Ardillero stood suddenly before him. He halted his sweating pony, and gazed at it.

The house was long and low, made from adobe bricks. He saw, at the distance, that the roof was of rough hand-split shakes—dark, weathered and massive. A line of thin white smoke rose above the roof-peak into the still sky of the sunset, and along the veranda that stretched the length of the house a single window was already lighted in a yellow pale rectangle. Past the house were the corrals, outbuildings and barn. Great cottonwoods mushroomed over the place.

"La hacienda del Ardillero," Haverley said softly to himself. It came to him that Wheaton might have imagined his guitar—in a place like this. He smiled. It would be easy enough.

The pony suddenly picked up its ears, started. In the sunset breeze a low cry had floated down from the hacienda. Haverley tensed in the saddle. The cry—he was sure of it—was human, the cry of a man in terror and pain. He stuck the spur rowels deep in the pony's sides.

AS he came before the house, the cry was repeated. It sounded on beyond, somewhere at the barn and corrals. He swung on past, noting in a half glance that one of the doors along the veranda had opened, then closed as quickly, apparently at sight of him.

Before the first of the corrals he drew the pony to a sliding halt. . . . . There were three men within the circled bars: he saw them at a glance. One, slender, tall, dressed in smartly cut riding breeches and jacket, stood leaning indolently against the side rails. The second was in the middle of the corral—a heavy-set *cholo*, who held a long whip in his hand. To the center snubbing-post the slim figure of a youth was bound, his back bared to the *cholo*.

The sight dazed Haverley for an instant. He had heard of such things—whippings. He had never before witnessed the act. His blood suddenly pounded, seethed. Afterward, he had no recollection of dismounting and leaning in through the corral gate. He remembered only the sight of the *cholo's* face before him, as he struck.

The man tried to fight back with the whip, while Haverley pushed him across the corral, feeling only the jar of the heavy body to his blows. He fought without reason, blindly, knowing only that his fists were pounding flesh.

The *cholo* turned to run. For an instant his thick jaw was exposed, lifted Haverley hit, and the man toppled backward, to stagger against the corral poles, then slump into a heap. Haverley stood, breathing hard, over him.

"Bravo!" commented a mocking voice, from behind.

HAVERLEY whirled, to see the speaker, the man in the natty riding clothes, stride stiffly out of the corral gate toward the hacienda. Haverley stared after him, restraining in his anger an uncertain impulse to follow and get his hands on this man who had so calmly stood by watching the whipping, who had perhaps commanded it.

Haverley sensed, however, as the figure disappeared, that the retreat was not necessarily a thing of fear. It was more as though the man had judged the scene to a nicety, and skillfully, briefly, haughtily withdrawn. The subtlety of military tactics depends upon the graceful retreat as well as the charge; the gambler knows his hand before he places the bet. Haverley decided, from things Wheaton had told him, that the man was Don Lugo Ardillero: and wondering just what such a beginning might come to mean, he turned to the youth.

"Gracias," the boy was mumbling between chattering teeth. *"Gracias, señor.* You are a good man. I shall never forget, *señor."*

Haverley undid the cords that tied the youth's arms to the post, and the boy almost fell. Yet Haverley saw that he was tall and strong for his age of perhaps eighteen. His eyes were docile, large and wide-spaced in the Indian-Spanish features of his face. He smiled slowly.

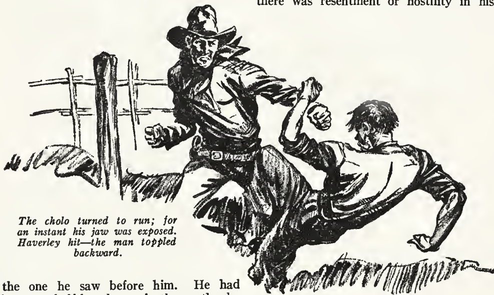
"Why did this happen?" Haverley asked him.

The boy's eyes became grave again, and he pointed to a side corral that opened off the one they stood in. For the first time Haverley noted the head of a magnificent great stallion reaching over the rails toward them. The animal was a *palamino* horse, the breed that is the pride of California—deep-cream coated animals, darker than the buckskin, with long silvery manes and tails.

Haverley uttered a soft exclamation, and the boy's eyes smiled again.

"Sí, señor. Is he not a great horse? The finest *palamino* you have ever seen?" There was a sudden fierce pride in his voice. "See, I am the one he loves. No other. See how his ears lift to me."

Haverley saw that it was true. There were men like this boy, he reflected, who could gently and softly in some strange way gain the affection of an animal like the one he saw before him. He had known a half-breed man in the south who had the way with him. Such men were rare on the ranges, and to be valued as breakers of spirited horses.



The cholo turned to run; for an instant his jaw was exposed. Haverley hit—the man toppled backward.

"Still I do not understand," he told the boy.

"No, señor? It is that Don Lugo has told me to break the animal, and now that the stallion is perfect under the saddle and rein, he will still have none of Jeff Gydon. Therefore Don Lugo says that the animal is not broke, and blames me. In fact, señor, just yesterday the stallion tried to strike and kill Gydon. He hates that man—as I do."

Jeff Gydon, Haverley remembered, was the name the old caretaker at White Ledge had spoken—Lugo's friend in the Pinto Cañon.

"I would run away," the boy whispered fiercely. "Except, señor, for this animal whom I love, and—Dolores."

"Dolores?" Haverley echoed.

"Sí." The boy suddenly shrank away from Haverley. *"Por Dios, señor,* speak not aloud of her again."

There was no time to say more to the boy. Haverley, glancing up, saw the slender, nattily dressed man, who had retreated so shortly before, come sauntering into the corral again. Evidently he had judged the atmosphere to have cooled, or perhaps, as it flashed through Haverley's mind, from a distance he had noted the conversation taking place and wished to put an end to it. He approached Haverley easily now, indifferently. If there was resentment or hostility in his eyes, it was veiled in the placidity of his smooth Castilian features. He lighted a cigarette before speaking.

"I suppose," he began in clear-cut English, "that the scene you just witnessed did seem unnecessarily brutal to you. As I consider it, I don't blame your action. However, there are very definite reasons for what was taking place. These people"—he made a motion toward the boy —"know only that form of punishment. It was given like that to their fathers and grandfathers, in the days of my father and grandfather. The boy, Juan, is free to go if he wishes to leave the place. I hold no strings. Merely, if he stays, he must obey me. My cause for punishment was sufficient. The stallion, supposedly broke, came near killing a friend."

He flecked a cigarette ash.

"Now may I ask," he said, "to what I owe the pleasure of your visit?"

"You are Don Lugo Ardillero?" Haverley asked stiffly.

"Yes—at your service."

"Colonel Wheaton, of Los Angeles," Haverley told him, "has sent me in here, to look over the *rancho* in these few days before its sale."

Don Lugo nodded.

"Yes. I have been expecting some one soon, and I realized, as I left the corral, that you were probably that person. We have few visitors, isolated as the ranch is." He paused, gazing down at the burning ash of his cigarette. "Will you come down to the hacienda now? Dinner is waiting."

He stepped before Haverley to lead the way, and seeing the *cholo* Haverley had knocked down stagger to his feet and hurry before them, he laughed—softly, mockingly, the sound barely audible over his shoulder.

CHAPTER III

ACROSS white table linen, set with dull gleaming old silver, Haverley watched Don Lugo Ardillero's face. The room they sat in was rectangular and long; the walls were white, and rough timbers beamed the ceiling. A candelabrum at each end of the room, and one at the table threw yellow circles of light, and made grotesque flickering shadows across the ceiling. To one wall, past a side door that Haverley noted, a narrow weapon case caught the light on glittering old swords, knives and a pair of gold-engraved dueling rapiers.

Don Lugo smiled.

"It is strange, is it not, Mr. Haverley, to find such as this? I wonder at it myself, sometimes, when I have just returned from a stay in one of your cities."

"Yes," said Haverley. "I left Los Angeles just this morning. The change is—well, it's almost unreal, coming so swiftly."

Lugo laughed and spoke a word to the old Mexican woman who served them, telling her they had finished.

"You see, Mr. Haverley," he continued. "the Rancho Ardillero is not different than it was fifty years ago, or still longer. My mother wished it so; and then, we are isolated, too, by the country. It is only possible for a wagon, with plenty of horses dragging it, to work up this far into the mountains, and that by a roundabout way. To the east is the desert—unchanged, for all the motorcars, popular inventions and a railroad crossing it, from what it was centuries ago. Yes, men die of thirst and starvation in this modern age—out there on the desert. Then, to the other direction are still more mountains, rising up in rough serried ranges before they drop again to the coast, its glistening pavements, bungalows and automobile horns. This is a country set apart, because it was made so. Never will it be used, with its steep brush hills, cañons and rocks, for more than cattle range. And it was just that fifty years, and more, ago. It is, after all, not so strange."

Haverley's eyes were looking past Lugo Ardillero into a corner of the room. There was a thin-legged little table standing there, and across the slender frame a rich many-colored silk shawl had been carelessly thrown. Its folds caught the glow of the nearest light and glistened in crinkling iridescent highlights. Don Lugo suddenly seemed to note the direction of his gaze, and half turned in his chair. An expression of annoyance crossed his olive face.

"You are undoubtedly tired from your trip today, Mr. Haverley," he changed the subject abruptly. "Let us leave the table, and, if it is your wish, I will show you to your room. We will probably have much to do tomorrow; there will be many things that you will wish to see."

They stood for a time about the room, talking; then Lugo led the way out to the veranda and on to a room that opened at its far end.

"Buenos noches," he said, after he had lighted a wall candle. Haverley heard his boot-heels go back over the rough tiles of the veranda.

HAVERLEY surveyed the room slowly. It was small, square. A bed stood at one corner, and by the door a single window casement opened onto the veranda, showing in its depth the great thickness of the adobe walls. This bare little room, in its lesser degree, also reflected the thing that he had seen in all the *rancho* and the country—something out of the past living on into the present, remote, strange.

Haverley reflected on it all once more. Except for Don Lugo's smartly cut riding-breeches and jacket and his mannerisms, he could have imagined himself in old Spanish California. The boy—Juan, his name was—at a whipping-post! Incredible! That sort of thing belonged to a

hundred years ago. And the boy had whispered, with terror, in his eyes: *"Por Dios, señor,* speak not again of her—*aloud."* What did he mean? Why not?

Haverley wandered about the room The day—two hundred miles by auto, then the ride. into the mountains from the ghost-like White Ledge—had tired him more than he had realized. Fully dressed, he sank back on the bed, idly watching the flicker of candle-light on the ceiling above him, thinking these things over.

Why? Her name the boy had whispered—Dolores. Spanish, that; musical and pleasing to the ear in its native accent. Dolores Winton, perhaps—daughter of John Winton, the American.

WHAT woke him he did not know; he had had no intention of going to sleep just then, when he lay down. He opened his eyes, and sat upright with a start, half-wondering at first where he was. The room was dark; evidently he had slept on while the candle had burned low and flickered out. Having no intention of sleep at the time, he had not opened the window. He saw the frame now—a rectangle of a gray thin-mooned night beyond, set in the inky blackness of the wall.

He felt depressed; his body was cramped. The air of the room was heavy and stale. He got to his feet slowly, stretched, then felt his way across to the window and flung it open.

The soft cool perfume of the night beyond drifted in—the odor of fresh grass and lupine flowers, down along the little flats of the valley, and the smell of the myriad tiny pink blossoms of the *alfileril-la*. Haverley leaned on the thick adobe casement, breathing the night and looking out. In the thin moonlight he could see down into the valley and trace the hazy silhouette lines of the ridges beyond. Little pale fragments of the light sifted through the cottonwoods overhead and scattered into checkered irregularity across the dooryard.

What hour of the night it was Haverley had no idea; late, he imagined—a moon so high in the sky. The time was of no concern. He felt in his pocket for papers, rolled and lit a cigarette, and went out onto the veranda. For a moment he paused, leaning back against the house wall, then began to slowly pace down the length of the tiles. He breathed great inhalations of the cool night air. It was good to stretch and move his body. At the far end of the veranda he halted briefly.

The air was like wine. He paced back again to the door of his room, careful to step lightly over the tiles and disturb no one in the house. His cigarette was half finished, burned more between his fingers than at his lips. Once down the veranda again, he decided, and he would undress and properly turn into bed for what remained of the night. . . . . At the far end of the veranda he paused again.

A movement, soft as the whisper of the giant cottonwoods overhead, came from around a corner of the house and caught his attention—the slight scrape of a boot-heel on hard adobe. Haverley waited, listening. The sound was repeated—lower, scarcely audible. He took a swift step back and peered around the corner of the house.

Just before him, a scant three paces away, the figure of a man was emerging from a low window. The figure lifted itself free, straightened, and hesitated against the outside wall. The man stood in dull silhouette against the pale light fragments beyond. His hands were lifting and fumbling with some small object, a narrow little box or jewel casket—something of metal, for light glistened faintly from it.

So much Haverley saw in dusky outline. Almost instantly a low half-cry from within the house. The figure, suddenly crouching low, leaped toward the veranda.

There was no time to consider his action. Haverley grappled with the man. His single thought was that he had caught a thief plundering his host's house. He threw his whole lean hard weight into action.

He heard the little box fall to the earth just after he struck. It was safe, anyway. Then he fought for a grip on the man, on a body slighter than his own, yet with muscles like steel and whalebone. The thief twisted—springy muscles, with a sudden cat-like fury and swiftness behind them.

Neither made a sound. They struggled back, almost before the window again. The tough wiry body bent in Haverley's grasp, as he found a hold. He twisted the man far over, with an arm grip on his neck and leverage at the shoulder, the body worming, turning in his arms.

He suddenly felt that the thief had freed an arm, and he tried to grasp it. A flash of movement. A cold sharp pain slid into his shoulder — needle-sharp into the muscles. The man had stabbed him? A knife was out! He let go to swing a blow at the thief's head. Then, for the flash of an instant, the face of the figure staggered back, upturned, into a patch of the thin sifted light. . . . . Haverley's blow missed and the man fled on into the night.

Haverley did not follow. He returned slowly to the end of the veranda and picked up the box.

It was of metal—old dull metal that had been cut and chased into an intricate surface of spirals and spider-web design, his fingers felt. It was heavy, undoubtedly a jewel casket; perhaps the metal itself was of silver. He held the thing foolishly in his hand, wondering just how to give it back into the household.

A SOFT voice, almost a whisper, from along the side of the house startled him. He whirled.

"Señor, will you come here? Señor—" The voice spoke in Spanish. It was the voice of a woman, soft, full-throated and rich in its intonation.

He stepped swiftly down to the window. She was leaning in the casement.

"Señor!" She suddenly drew back, startled. "Oh," she said, "you are the stranger who came tonight."

He bowed slightly.

"Si, senorita, the stranger."

He could see but little of her, back as she was in the deep shadows of the casement—a face, oval, diminutive and white in the darkness, a slender hand that still clutched the outer rim of the window ledge, no more.

"You fought him," she said at last, still in Spanish. "Was there anything, señor, anything more? Could the thief have dropped what he carried, or could you have taken it from him? A little casket of silver, señor?"

He lifted it slowly up to her.

"Oh," she breathed. Then: *"Valgate Dios, señor!"*

She had taken it, and was drawing back into the room. He turned away, bowing his head to her again. As suddenly she was back at the window once more.

"I have not thanked you enough," she said, her words suddenly turned to English, English which still held something of the soft Spanish in its sound. "Not enough, nor can I. The little casket has valuable things in it—two pictures, one of my father and one of my mother. I cannot thank you enough,"—she hesitated—"my friend."

She was holding out a hand to Haverley. He took it and felt the even firm pressure of her fingers.

"That is American, like yourself, is it not?" she said, a smile in her voice. "But I am not Spanish, either—my father's name was John Winton and my mother's, Mary."

Then again she had drawn quietly back into the room.

SLOWLY Haverley turned and went back to the veranda, wandering along its length to his own room. Winton, she had said! That much of the story was not a myth, then. She was real—a girl of Yankee blood, raised under Señora Concepcion Ardillero's care as the Señora's own child. And she had said that the pictures of her father and mother rested in the little casket; that that was why she valued it.

Such reason, however, Jim Haverley reflected, could not have been why Don Lugo Ardillero wanted it. Nor did it seem likely that the value of the silver would have tempted him. Nevertheless, he had seen, in that brief flash when the thin streak of light fell across the man's face, that the thief was Don Lugo.

In the room Haverley lighted matches, one by one, and examined the cut in his shoulder. It was not deep enough to offer him serious trouble. It should, nevertheless, be cleansed and wrapped. He debated what he should do, whether to attempt to call some one in the house or to let it go until morning. Morning seemed the easiest, and after all the cut did not amount to much. He felt his way over to the bed and sat down. Sleep was out of the question, at least for a time.

CHAPTER IV

HALF an hour might have passed—he had no way of knowing—when the door before him creaked open cautiously. Haverley felt for a match and poised it in his fingers ready to strike. A voice came softly:

The man stood in silhouette against the light, his hands fumbling with some small object.

"Señor!" Haverley recognized the voice. It was the boy Juan.

"Yes," he answered, "come in. I'm over here by the wall."

"Be still, señor," the boy hissed, as he came forward swiftly. "It was Don Lugo you fought—yes. I saw."

Haverley laughed softly.

"Yes, I saw too. . . . . Juan, can you get me water and bandages? He stuck me in the shoulder."

The boy uttered a whispered exclamation.

"I will try, señor—soon. Now Dolores waits to see you. Will you follow me, señor?"

"Dolores! Why, Juan?"

"Señor, something more happens tonight. The man they call Jeff Gydon has just come in at the corrals. Don Lugo has met him there—"

"Jeff Gydon?" Haverley questioned.

"Si, from the Pinto. He is like a bull in strength. Señor, have you a gun?"

"No. That wont be necessary, I guess."

"Dios! I wish I could get one for you, but Lugo keeps them locked in the safe in his room." The boy's voice quavered with fear and nervousness. "Señor, I fear for Dolores. You have fought for her once—and you would again, señor? Come, she wishes to see you now. But señor, I am not saddling a horse for you as she has commanded."

Haverley followed him out onto the veranda, past the window to the main room, then to the door.

"She is just inside," the boy said, and disappeared on down into the shadows.

Haverley hesitated a moment before he swung the door open.

The girl's voice greeted him softly from the darkness.

"Señor—"

Haverley could see nothing of her; yet her presence was evident. He smelled a faint perfume that was different and still not unlike the odor of the tiny spicy flowers

of the *alfilerilla* blossoming in the valley beyond the hacienda. Her skirts rustled softly as she took a step forward.

"Señor, you must go now," her voice continued swiftly in Spanish. "That is why I have asked you to come—so that I myself might tell you, and you would believe. Juan is saddling you a horse."

"Leave?" he asked. "Leave—why, Miss Winton?"

"I do not know. Yet I know it is best for you to go."

"You do not know?" he considered. "Then, you—you wish me to go?"

"No, not I. Believe that." Her voice became lower. "But something is happening here—something not good. It is dangerous for you to stay; you may be drawn into it. The man you fought tonight was Lugo himself—Juan told me."

Haverley laughed softly.

"Yes, I know. But that is no reason for me to leave. You must take better care of the box in the future, Miss Winton."

She did not answer immediately. After a pause:

"That is not all. I can't explain, for I do not know. But there is more. Lugo and this man Jeff Gydon plan together; something is in the wind. They began moving the cattle, strangely, two days ago."

"Moving the cattle—where?" Haverley asked, suddenly knowing that this knowledge was of value to what Wheaton expected of him.

"To the Pinto Cañon, I think. From the hacienda here I have seen the dust-heads that hang above little bands of moving stock, cross the valley in that direction. The *vaqueros* haven't been in to the *rancho* for two nights now. I do not understand it—no. But something is happening. It is nothing to you, a stranger. You must ride on before—"

"Before?" Haverley questioned.

"Before it is too late. Go now! Your horse—" Her words ceased with a sharp intake of breath. She stood so close that Haverley felt the turn of her head, a wisp of hair across his cheek as she whispered: "Hush!"

Up the veranda, in the location of Haverley's room, a door had slammed. A voice was speaking in English—indistinguishable words, heavy, low, thick in accent. Boot-heels clicked on the veranda tiles, the grate of a spur-rowel dragging along.

Haverley felt her hand touch his arm. "Quick—come with me!" She was leading him across the room toward the side door he remembered, past the rack of old cutlery. "Stay here, Josefa," she whispered over her shoulder. "Light a candle, as though you had come for a drink of water."

For the first time Haverley realized that she had not been alone in the room; some other woman was with her. Even in this she had obeyed a custom he had thought long dead, a custom forgotten.

THEY passed down a hall, he sensed; the sleeve of his arm touched a rough wall. She guided him on. Then softly she swung open a side door.

The square of a window, pale gray, marked one wall of the room they entered. Through it Haverley could see the checked irregularity of thin moonlight across the ground outside, and he heard the tiny rustle of the overhead cottonwood leaves in the night. He knew that this was her room; from this window she had called to him so shortly before. Now, he sensed, rather than saw, that she had remained at the door, listening back down the hall.

Half a moment passed. The click of boot-heels went the length of the veranda —faint, muffled in sound—paused briefly, and returned. Then a door—the one that opened to the main room, he guessed—suddenly rattled open. . . . . Again the voice speaking in thick blurred English. The silence of a few seconds. At last, a flicker of yellow light dancing down the hall and showing him the outline of the door they had just come through and the shadow of Dolores' head leaning into it.

"What are you doing here?"—Lugo's words, from the main room.

A voice answered—the woman who had been with Dolores, Josefa. The words were too low for Haverley to hear.

"Did the stranger come here?" Lugo asked. "That's what I want to know."

Again the woman's voice. A pause.

"I'll see her," Lugo said. "Tell her to come here immediately."

IN a second, steps were coming down the hall, and Dolores had turned and stepped close to Haverley.

"Leave by that window over there. Quick! You see it is as I have said; you are drawn into it." Haverley made no movement. *"Por Dios*, go, señor! Juan will have your horse waiting at the barn—"

"I cannot leave, Miss Winton."

The woman's voice came from the door: "Dolores, Don Lugo wishes you to come —immediately."

Dolores answered calmly, clearly, so that the words would carry to the main room:

"Yes, Josefa—in a moment." To Haverley she whispered, "I will keep them there a moment. Go!"

He felt the pressure of her hand along his sleeve for a second; then she was gone —short, quick little steps going back along the hall.

The crack of the door was still open. Haverley stepped to it. Twice now, he reflected suddenly, he had met her, been with her, and yet he had not seen her. He knew merely the vague white oval of her face in the shadow of the window, the touch of her hand, and the wisp of her hair that had brushed across his face—no more.

From the main room Lugo's words greeted her:

"Where is the stranger, señorita? I presume it possible that you know."

"Yes?" she countered. "And why so, Lugo? How should I know?"

"Let that pass. The fact is, he is gone. Chino has watched the barns—not there. Now where, señorita?"

FOR the first time the heavy voice spoke clearly—the voice of the man called Jeff Gydon, Haverley knew:

"You're wastin' time, Lugo. Go back to her room. My man's watchin' outside—"

Haverley stiffened. This thing had gone far enough. Lugo, now reinforced by this second man, evidently surmised that he, Haverley, had kept the little jewel-casket, and Lugo was intent on getting it back, whatever the result. Well enough, except that Lugo did not seem to realize who held the whip hand—a word to Wheaton, one way or the other, as Wheaton was expecting. Before it was all over, Haverley decided that he would demand to know what was in that little box, why Lugo wanted it so much. And Lugo would not get it from Dolores now, not if he could help it.

He opened the door, stepped out into the hall and strode up toward the doorway, now yellow with thin light. He felt, rather than saw, the tenseness in the listening room before him. He heard a faint word from Dolores, a word caught in her throat before it gained full utterance.

HE paused at the door. A single candelabrum, on the table, was lighted. Lugo stood to one side, Dolores before him. A big-bodied figure loomed up at Lugo's back—that was Gydon, evidently. The woman Josefa—old, wizen, the servant who had brought dinner that night—had slunk back into a corner. Each figure Haverley noted; yet his eyes saw only Dolores.

She stood just before the light. He saw the contour of her features, the oval of her face, her hair massed high and caught behind with a great tortoise comb. It was her hair that held his attention—a rich dark auburn in color. Auburn hair over deep-blue eyes! She was a picture of contrast. A full-flung skirt fell to the floor; the bodice above it was snug, fitting the lines of her body. The dress of a Spanish *hija* of the long past! And the girl had deep red hair and blue eyes.

"The señor in question himself," Lugo's voice cut in, mockery in the words. "Yes, assuredly. Now, señor—"

Haverley turned to him.

"And just what do you want with me?"

"A certain little jewel-casket was stolen this evening. Need I remind you?"

"No."

The man at Lugo's back had stepped forward. Haverley's eyes riveted, measuring him. He was tall, heavy-set, huge. Perched upon the width of his shoulders, his head seemed too small. The face was flat and expressionless. Beady eyes, under the rim of a slouch hat and a fringe of draggled straw-yellow hair, peered out intently, shifting in the stolid features.

"Cut the noise," he growled, "and come through with the box. I mean business."

"So?" Haverley questioned.

The man was striding toward him, slouching, slow. That his strength must be tremendous, Haverley saw—the bulging shoulder-muscles under the dirty rag of a coat he wore, the thick corded neck.

A little scream came from Dolores.

"Lugo, I have the box. I will get it for you. Lugo, this stranger did not steal it. You know that. And when it came to his hand, he gave it back to me. Lugo—"

The man Gydon had stopped. Lugo smiled a bit.

"Yes, get the box for me," he told her.

SHE paused a moment, looking from one face to another; then turned and ran down the hall. They stood in silence in the room, each waiting for the other's

move. Gydon slouched away to lean heavily on the table. Haverley spoke first:

"There seems to be one thing you have forgotten in all this, Ardillero. That is, that Wheaton is buying the east half of the *rancho,* or not, according to my report. Understand? Necessarily, my report will depend on getting several things that have just happened straightened out. Such things as why you want this casket so badly. You seem to have forgotten that."

"No," said Lugo calmly, "I do not forget. That is the reason I am doing this."

"What do you mean—"

Haverley's words stopped. Dolores had come back through the door. In her left hand she carried the little engraved jewel-casket.

"Lugo," she said, "there are two pictures in this that I value. May I take them out first?"

The light glinted dully across the old rack of cutlery. A pin-point of yellow highlight glistened from one of the pair of old dueling rapiers. Haverley stared at it. Gold-engraved dueling rapiers, handed down from a time far to the past!

Perhaps Lugo Ardillero saw the sudden fixing of Haverley's gaze. He stepped swiftly toward Dolores and snatched the casket from her hand.

Strained, tense silence in the room. Jeff Gydon, at the table, stiffened. Lugo Ardillero had half turned away from Dolores. Haverley leaped.

CHAPTER V

THE thing happened in an instant. Lugo staggered before the impact of Haverley's body. The box loosened in his grip. It was torn from his fingers. Then the two men fell apart, and Haverley, crouched, swung a straight-driven fist at Lugo's head. The sound of the blow was muffled and dull. The old woman screamed. Lugo staggered, toppling sidewise.

With a gesture, more than his arm, Haverley pushed Dolores back into the open doorway. She did not scream; mutely she obeyed. He saw only a flash of her tense white face. . . . . The last he saw of her was that same tensed face. One arm flung back to each of the casements, she stood; the old woman crouched beside her, clinging to her.

Jeff Gydon's huge body poised and leaped. The man's great strength made him clumsy. Haverley dodged and leaped on. His fingers grasped the closer of the two weapons. It came loose at his touch. And after he had pivoted for the corner of the room, he heard the second of the pair clatter to the floor.

Gydon halted back across the room. Lugo was rising to his feet. In the corner of the room Haverley stood at bay, a dueling rapier, relic of time long passed, in his right hand, the little oblong jewel-case in his left. The battle-drums of pounding blood beat in his temples. Past Lugo, Haverley saw the frame of the window that opened onto the veranda. Juan's face, dimly lighted, was pressed close against the pane there, peering with great wide eyes into the room.

Lugo could laugh still. The flit of a smile crossed his lips, while he waved his head from side to side to clear his vision. Gydon was fumbling clumsily under the armpit of his coat—obviously he was going for a gun.

"No!" Lugo suddenly shouted at him in Spanish. "No! I owe him this! Keep out of it!"

Swiftly Lugo bent and picked up the second rapier. He twisted the slender steel back in a half-circle and let it whip straight again. With a little laugh he fell to the guard, and danced toward Haverley in the quick weaving steps of a trained *esgrimidor.*

Dolores called once: "Lugo! Lugo! Think what you do!"

The old woman clung frantically to hold her back.

The room was suddenly quiet. Thin reflected lines of brilliance glittered and danced on the rapier blades. Lugo Ardillero's face was strained in expression; his eyes had that strange luminous fire in them that Haverley had seen at the corral at sunset. His grace was sinuous, lithe, snakelike. He drove forward.

The blades clashed—steel upon steel, with the sound of a knife along a sharpening-iron. They flashed, drew back, shot out again, twisted, while tiny lightning highlight lines sparkled from the points. . . . . . The weapon, Haverley suddenly realized, was little better than a limber willow switch in his hands. He struck with it and hit steel, while a mocking little laugh came from Lugo. He drove and encountered empty air. Once, when a thrust from Lugo would have run him through, he countered instinctively with his

left hand and Lugo's point clashed into the metal of the jewel-case.

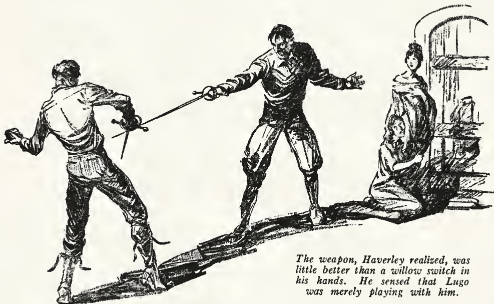
Haverley was driven from the corner; slowly worked back along the far wall of the room. Seconds snapped by. He saw only Lugo and the weaving thin blade against him. He sensed that Lugo was playing with him, before a final stroke—

A scream from Dolores cut the air. The stilted frame of a light chair crashed down before Haverley's eyes, shattering itself on the floor. The rapier was snapped from his grasp. Lugo shouted a single word, a command that was a curse.

Haverley saw the thing in flashes: Jeff Gydon, leaning over the now-broken chair which he had swung at Haverley's head from behind. Lugo's face, white, convulsed with anger; the rapier that had been in his hand snapped in two pieces, lying on the floor. . . . . Haverley whirled to get away from Gydon's lifting arms, a remnant of the broken chair still in one of the huge hands.

For the flash of a second, then, his gaze crossed the window. The face was still pressed close to the pane there, gazing with fright-wide large eyes into the room. Haverley hurled the jewel-casket at the window, and he heard the crash as it went through, and the musical after-tinkle of glass fragments falling to the veranda tiles.

That much before the rung of the broken chair in Gydon's hand came down on his head.



The weapon, Haverley realized, was little better than a willow switch in his hands. He sensed that Lugo was merely playing with him.

WAKING now, seeming to come from under a black fog-bank of dizziness, he had no idea where he was, except that he was still at the Rancho Ardillero—in some one of the outbuildings of the place, probably. He lay on the floor of a tiny adobe-walled room, while high overhead a little window let in a streak of sunlight—a yellow shaft that spattered on the far wall in a shadow-lined square. The window had bars across it, then, he decided, and the hour was early morning sometime.

Haverley moved his body. It seemed to have aches in every joint. The knife-wound in his shoulder burned; his mouth and throat were feverish; a dull throbbing ache ran through his head. He sat up slowly, twisting the cramps from his legs.

The fact that he was not bound seemed to speak plainly that the room was secure against escape. What would happen now, he wondered, without great interest. After all, he was lucky not to have been run through by the rapier in Lugo's hand. The main fact of the thing remained, that the deal on the Rancho Ardillero would not go through unless word came from him to Wheaton. His blood quickened. What of the girl Dolores? What had happened to her? The last he knew she stood against the side door of the room, her face blanched, still, while the old woman clung to her. Before her they had fought in the

thin light of the single candelabrum—until Jeff Gydon had swung the chair that had missed and crashed into the weaving rapiers.

After that, darkness. Haverley had even no idea of what time in the night it had all happened. Had the boy Juan had the presence of mind to take the jewel-casket and flee? Haverley doubted it; yet at the time that was the only chance. And what did the casket contain? Useless thoughts, he realized, and not likely to be answered for the thinking. Yet they continued to drum through his head, one upon the other, as the moments went by.

Perhaps an hour had passed like this, Haverley again lying on the floor, when he heard faint footsteps outside the walls, the tinkle of a spur. Some one spoke. The sound of a key turned in a rusty lock, a bolt slid back, and the thick plank door of the room creaked in. On the door-sill stood Lugo Ardillero, dressed as Haverley had first seen him the night before, in smartly cut riding-breeches and jacket.

"So?" Lugo spoke first, eying him. "Rather an inglorious end, señor, for one who fancied himself an *esgrimidor* with the rapiers of Ardillero. Rather!"

JIM HAVERLEY scowled, and nodded at the truth of the words.

"Don't forget what I told you last night," he reminded Lugo.

"What's that?"

"That Wheaton is holding everything in hand until he hears from me. I've discovered one of the main things I came to find out for Wheaton. I mean Miss Winton; if she has a claim on the place, as I believe—"

Lugo laughed.

"So? And where, now, do you think Miss Winton is? Waiting here still, perhaps? And that you are free to go? Señor—"

Haverley struggled to his feet.

"What the devil do you mean?"

"*Nada, señor*—merely that she is in safekeeping until the deal goes through. Perfect safekeeping, where none of the servants will be tempted to let her out, or listen to her plea to let you go. Consider that, Mr. Haverley." His voice changed suddenly. "You seem to work on the assumption that I am a complete fool. Now get this through your head: From the time that you saw Miss Winton last night, you have not had the slightest chance of seeing Wheaton until the deal has gone through. I've been expecting you, or some one like you. You were merely a bit early, and thus in the end it was necessary to play with time a bit until Gydon got here. You were fool enough to blunder into things last night and learn more than was healthy. . . . . Señor, you are at the Rancho Ardillero, in a country men mostly have forgotten. Now you will stay here for a time."

He paused, eying Haverley slowly. Behind his shoulder was the thick face of the *cholo* who had wielded the whip the evening before. His small dull eyes blazed hate for Haverley. Lugo turned.

"Put them in here, Chino," he told the man, and the *cholo* put a platter of bread and dried meat and a jug of water inside the room on the floor. The door closed behind them.

"Oh, by the way,"—Lugo's head appeared again,— "do not let the matter of word to Wheaton worry you. I'll send it. You were to phone the message out to the railroad, were you not? Yes, of course, since that is the only way. Then from there to Wheaton by telegram. Of course—"

The door closed, and the rusty bolt slid into place. The lock clicked.

"In the country men mostly have forgotten," Haverley said to himself. Yes, it was just that—an isolated strip of mountain land behind the ranges of the coast and beside the desert, a country close, yet cut off from the world because of its natural boundaries. White Ledge was its nearest point of contact with the life beyond—White Ledge, a phantomlike ghost town of the past, where one old man now lived. "A country men mostly have forgotten!" Some one—Joe Anderson, he believed the name was, an old-time sheriff—had said something like that to Wheaton: "The place is the same outwardly as when I saw it for the first time forty years ago."

Back and forth, outside the adobe walls somewhere, a man paced—the sound of shuffling feet, aimlessly moving about. By grasping the bars, Haverley lifted his face to the window. It was the *cholo* Chino, evidently on guard.

What had Lugo meant about Dolores—that she was in safekeeping until the deal went through? Had he, then—he and this Jeff Gydon — taken her forcibly away? Thoughts seethed through Haverley's mind. He turned to pacing the room—just three steps, then back. After a time, he bathed

the wound at his shoulder with water from the jug and a piece of torn shirt.

The morning wore slowly on. The room grew hot. The *cholo,* Haverley saw by lifting himself up again to the window, had sought the shade of a tree across the edge of the corrals. He was drowsily nodding in the heat. The barred square of sunlight that had shot across the room was now a narrow line below the window. Not long, and that was gone. The tiny room became stifling.

Haverley drank what water was left in the jug, and sank down into the corner by the door. His body was feverish; the heat of the place nauseated him. . . . . A long time he passed like this, in a dull half-stupor. Flitting half-dreams ran through his mind. He fought over the duel in the main room of the hacienda; but this time, in his dream, he was victorious. He held the little jewel-casket in his hand, and opening it, he found by chance that the thing had a secret pocket at its base. That was odd! Yet not so strange, either, for the pocket held an old document, and he remembered that he had already decided such a paper existed. It was signed in the name of Santiago José Ardillero, with a great flourish, and gave certain lands to John Winton, his friend and benefactor, by so-many and such-and-such an amount of gold dollars. A great exultation filled Haverley's dream—an illogical joy, for by this Wheaton did not get what Haverley had come for.

HE was roused by the click of the door-latch, a key turning slowly. His mind cleared suddenly. His first thought was that the *cholo* was returning. The movement was stealthy and low. The bolt grated back. As Haverley sat erect, his hand encountered the water-jug. It was a weapon of sorts, if a weapon could be used, if he could take the man by surprise and overpower him.

A long moment of silence before the door began to swing in. Then Juan's voice hissed softly, as it had the night before: "Señor!"

Haverley had the door edge in his fingers and swung it wide. The boy stood without, trembling, fear in his eyes.

"Quick!" he whispered. "Go to the right, along the side of the barn."

The *cholo* was sleeping under the tree, face toward them, slumbering heavily, with the changing shadow already letting hot middle-afternoon sunlight across his knees. Haverley glanced at him for a second, and ran, as the boy had told him, dodging along the side of the barn. At the corner he halted and peered back.

The boy was slowly approaching the *cholo,* haltingly, taking a step or two forward at a time. Then he had reached the *cholo's* side, and had thrust the key swiftly down into a pocket of the man's dirty trousers and drawn back. The *cholo* turned over slowly, drowsily. He stretched; his eyes flickered open. Haverley heard his rumbling voice, still heavy with sleep.

"Dog of a boy! Get away from me. You think to catch Chino asleep, huh? Pay him for the beatings he has given you? Wait until he uses the lash again. *Por Dios,* you will scream!"

One of the *cholo's* dirty hands felt at his side pocket, and, grumbling, he lay still again, while the boy edged away. Haverley smiled grimly, and went on along the far edge of the barn. The boy, timid and easily frightened, was still no fool.

Juan met him at the door beyond.

"The horses are inside," he said, still in a whisper. "Let us be gone. Quick, señor!"

Within, Haverley saw the shadowy forms. One of the horses was the great palamino stallion; the other a tall broad-chested bay. Both were saddled, waiting; and he saw, as they went closer, that the palamino was covered with long streaks of dried lather and dust.

"You have ridden?" he asked the boy.

"*Sí, señor*—since dawn."

The words reassured Haverley. The boy had evidently planned and knew what he was doing. Without question Haverley swung onto the bay's back, and, bending low to ride through the barn door, followed.

Outside, the boy turned close along the side of the adobe walls, then hit in a straight line for the valley, his eyes turned back. He was keeping the bulk of the building between themselves and the drowsing *cholo* without regard for the hacienda, Haverley saw. They passed close to it, moving at a soft jog-trot. The house, then, was deserted.

CHAPTER VI

THE hour was close to sunset once more. Rough-edged shadows climbed high on the far sides of the valleys and the walls

of ravines. The desert, down over serried banks of foothills, patches of cut-up eroded *barranca* lands, and the more regular near ridges of the mountains, was changing color, a dusty tinged purple blending over it. It appeared near, the edge of it; while the far flat wastes went on and on and were lost to the eye. Juan's arm pointed back, toward the south and east, down into the foothill edge.

"White Ledge," he said, "—twenty miles. You can just see the buildings. The road to Gydon's swings back up from there, up the Pinto to the site of the diggings."

To Haverley's eyes the town of deserted buildings was invisible in the haze. He looked ahead, straightening in the saddle. Somewhere just ahead the upper reaches of the Pinto cut into the mountains, before the cañon wound on and swung back to White Ledge. Of Juan he asked:

"How far now, *amigo?*"

"The cañon opens beyond the next ridge. On the ridge top Josefa will meet us, if she has not failed. . . . . Ease up on your horse, señor; nothing can be done before nightfall—the place is in the open."

"There is much chance Josefa will fail?"

"Señor, she is an old woman. Since I can remember, I have never seen her ride before. It is far over to Pablo Gonzales' shack, into the high mountains, then back; and, señor, it is possible Pablo does not still have the rifle he had two months ago. He might have sold it; he is a poor man. Or again, he may not have shells to load it. . . . . It was the best I could do, señor, to send her."

HAVERLEY nodded. He felt now, suddenly, even more than when he had found himself imprisoned in the tiny adobe outbuilding, the sense of futility to his movements; he was playing against the unknown, the unfamiliar. Things that had happened flashed through his mind with the unreality of a grotesque nightmare. Yet he had come to the Rancho Ardillero on a common enough mission, he reflected, merely to look over the place and check cattle in the few days before its sale. A bit of mystery, yes—not, however, enough to cause Wheaton more than suspicion, poorly founded, not enough to halt the deal. Haverley had not even thought it necessary to bring a gun; now he knew not what hung on that blunder.

The old woman Josefa was to get a single rifle, perhaps without shells, from a Pablo Gonzales. She had ridden since morning to accomplish a thing that seemed little more than hope. And somewhere ahead, down in the cañon beyond the next ridge, was the girl Dolores—Dolores Winton, a strange slender daughter of a John Winton of the past, a child raised under Señora Concepcion Ardillero's care as her own, in a fashion of a half century gone by. In safekeeping, Lugo had put it. . . . . The thing that had originally brought Haverley to the Ardillero seemed insignificant against this. He felt somehow that what had happened was in a way his fault, that he was to blame; he, unknowing, had stumbled into things, blundered perhaps, and set fire to motives that had swiftly ignited into a powder-chain of action.

"JUAN," Haverley asked, for another time, "you followed the whole way, you saw that they took her there? There's no chance to be mistaken?"

"*Sí, señor*—Gydon and his man. Josefa and I followed. Then Lugo came afterward. I saw him at a distance, as I returned for you.

"Señor," Juan went on, "your coming to the Ardillero is as from God. This Jeff Gydon, he has come too often to the *rancho* lately, to talk too much with Lugo. I have feared—I knew not what. Now it has happened." His voice become tense. "Señor," he asked again, "you will fight for her, fight with your life? You fight better than I can ever hope to do. I have seen. But señor, I am at your side."

There would be one rifle, at best, Haverley reflected. To the boy he answered:

"Yes, Juan." Then: "Juan, you saw Lugo get the jewel-casket?"

"*Sí, señor.* I could not find the thing in the dark; then they had come out, Lugo carrying the candelabrum. Gydon went before him, searching, and he soon enough picked it up, although the thing had broken open and spilled a necklace and other things out. I saw it all from a distance, even hearing their words.

" 'Give it here,' Lugo commanded, while Gydon still held it, and Lugo picked up what was on the ground.

" 'It is heavy,' Gydon said, lingering, as though he liked the feel of it. 'The jewels must be of good value, Lugo.'

"I saw Lugo smile at that, the candle close to his face, while he answered: 'Yes, yes, of course. Why else would I go to such trouble to get it?'

For the first time the old man spoke. "Stick 'em up, feller!" Haverley whirled. "Who are you?" he asked fiercely.

"Slowly Gydon gave it back to him."

The long steep slope of the ridge was falling back. Saddle-leather creaked to the deep breathing of the horses and the movement of bunched muscles.

"Juan," Haverley questioned, "Dolores said that Lugo was moving cattle. Where?"

"Into the Pinto, señor, to Gydon's. All of the animals fat enough for beef."

"What is the reason for that?"

"I think Lugo is selling many, señor."

"Selling?"

"*Sí.* The road can be traveled from White Ledge in as far as Gydon lives. In the old times, long before I was born and when White Ledge had many miners, a road was built into the Pinto Cañon that far, to open new diggings. It is passable even today."

Haverley nodded silently. There was no especial surprise for him in the boy's words. Lugo was making a final clean-up, that was all—a thing of carefully dovetailed plans. Selling the east half of the Ardillero, he at the same time intended to make a double sale on a portion of the cattle. Haverley had realized at Dolores' words the night before that something of the sort was going on. Things of a kindred kind had happened often enough in the history of any cattle country; it was out-and-out rustling, with just a little different slant to it, that was all. . . . . Twenty-four hours before, this in itself would have been to Haverley an event of major importance; now what lay before them dwarfed all else. This could be straightened up later or left—it didn't matter.

For the hundredth time Jim Haverley seemed to see Dolores again, as she had been, half-silhouetted, before the light of the single candelabrum.

"Leave our horses here, señor," the voice of Juan said at his side, "before we come out on the skyline of the ridge. It is still light enough to be seen, even at this distance."

THEY tied the animals, loosening the *cincha* straps.

"Wait here," Juan said; and he was gone on foot up against the skyline.

Haverley waited, nervously rolling and lighting a cigarette. Shadows had come to reach far ridge walls; valleys were mellow in blue haze, misty with coming night. The west flamed. A flat peak, close to one side, stood up above the others, and it was red with sunset light. A ridge-top down beyond colored. The desert, misty, unfathomable, seemed to fade into nothing as he looked at it. Magic playing with forgotten country.

Juan was back at his side.

"There are no tracks, señor. She has not come yet. Come up and look beyond into the Pinto."

Haverley followed at his side, and they stopped against the huddled branches of a piñon.

The cañon was deeper than Haverley had expected, a great rough gorge splitting the mountains, and later the foothills, to cut a way out. It seemed, also, to have opened a path for the desert to creep in, in a long crooked finger. The brush and piñon timber of the higher lands grew thin and died down the walls. Ragged patches of bare gravel-earth stood out, bleached and white, in the shadows; eroded sharp-edged side ravines cut the slopes. Deep below, in the bottoms, the sinuous light line of the wash ran, twisting from side to side on until the cañon widened and swung back in the foothills toward White Ledge.

"Old diggings, you said, Juan?" Haverley asked.

"Yes. See there,"—the boy's arm pointed,— "down to the left. One can just make out the square of the house where Gydon now lives. It is in the shadow, on that tiny flat above the wash. There are other little shacks about, where men once lived, but they have mostly fallen to ruins. Gydon's house was the gambling-hall and saloon of the camp; it was built better than the others."

Haverley saw, then his eyes were tracing down the cañon. A tiny threadlike line of white went away, crossing the wash twice, eventually disappearing in shadow.

"The road, Juan?" he asked, gesturing.

"Yes."

"Trucks take the cattle?"

"I suppose so, señor. That is the way Lugo has shipped once before in the past. It is cheaper than driving the beef to a loading-point on the railroad, I have heard him say. The drive wears much flesh from the animals."

"Yes." In this case, also, it would be advisable for other reasons, Haverley decided. The modern cattle-thief works in this way. A truck will carry a third, or a half carload of beef steers; it can zigzag its way over the whole of a state with maximum rapidity; animals on the range one dusk can be hung butchered in a market a hundred miles away by the next sunrise, ready for sale. It was a game with profits to dazzle the old-time rustler. Such a crew Lugo likely was employing, daring, dangerous men.

JUAN had restlessly swung back to look across the way they had come. The boy spoke slowly:

"Look back, señor. See yonder, over the way we have come—not far. See? A little dust-head rises out of a ravine, white in the shadows. See?"

Haverley nodded.

"The *vaqueros* coming with another band?" he asked.

"*Sí.* They were to work the upper part of the east range today, I knew. They are late."

The dusk deepened. Haverley stood motionless, looking back.

"Juan," he asked suddenly, "how many of the *vaqueros* are there?"

"Four, señor."

"If these four knew of Dolores, Juan, would they not ride with us? Some of them are surely armed."

The boy did not answer for a moment; then:

"No, señor, not openly. They are men, like myself, who have always been at the Ardillero. Lugo is master. They would obey him in the end, even if they did not want to. I know, señor."

From what Haverley had already seen, he realized that this was true.

"Then, Juan," he said, "we must strike before they come—"

He saw that the boy was not listening to him. Juan's body was tensed, alert and still. He lifted a hand in a gesture of silence. Then suddenly he whistled into the dusk, a soft low note that was birdlike in sound. A few seconds of silence, and an answering note floated up from the side of the ridge. The thud of a horse's hoofs came softly to Haverley's ears.

"Josefa!" Juan said.

IN a moment they saw her form, astride a slight pony, come out in the dusk before them. Juan leaped on with a little cry, and reached to lift her from the saddle.

"*Josefa* mia," he said. "The rifle! Had Pablo shells for it also?"

She smiled wanly.

"*Sí, muchacho*—six of them. Look."

The rifle, Haverley saw, was a thirty-thirty carbine. The shells caught the last light of the day, as she pulled them from some place in her dress, one by one, and handed them to Juan. Six shells! She spoke of them as many, a piece of great good fortune. Six!

"I would have ridden to meet you," Juan was saying, "only I knew not how you would come to this point." His

speech ran on with soft praise for her. "And you are in time, Josefa; we could not have risked going down the slope earlier."

She would not dismount, saying that she would not be able to mount again. There was no other way; they left her so, astride the drooping pony, waiting for strength apparently to ride on or to follow them.

In the half-light Haverley followed the palamino over the crest of the ridge. The horses slid back on their haunches, jolting stiff-legged, zigzagging down. The cañon bottoms were dark with dusk now, objects blending one into the other. They rode into a haze, seemingly of nothingness. Juan's voice drifted back:

"Señor, there is something—something within me that tells me to say *adios* to you, now while I can still say it. And, señor, if I do not see her, I say *adios* to Dolores also, by you."

"Hush, boy! You can't go into a fight feeling that way."

Juan did not speak again for a moment, and when he did, Haverley forgot the earlier words.

"Look down cañon, señor—far away, where it swings from White Ledge. Look! There, they flash again! See, the lights of a motor—two—coming up the cañon road, señor!"

CHAPTER VII

AHEAD, the palamino's hoofs clattered softly into rocks—the boulders of the wash, Haverley knew. Then the sound stilled, while his own horse slid on down the last little pitch to the bottoms. Juan's voice came, in a high whisper:

"This way—to the left, señor. We will go onto the flat at the far end."

Haverley followed, and knew that they swung up-cañon. Shortly Juan drew into a fringe of brush, and they tied the horses. Above, the side ridge that they had come down towered against the pale of early-night sky, black in silhouette under glinting pin-point stars. The cañon bottom was dark; objects were faintly discernible in it, looming out with unnatural grotesque forms, then swiftly blending again, as they passed, into the night. . . . .

It was thus with the great barnlike shack where Gydon had come to live—once a dance-hall in new diggings, Juan had said. It appeared suddenly out of the night, close before them—huge, unlighted, black; vaguely formed in detail, yet plain in bulk against the lighter sky above. There was something menacing in the sight of the place. Haverley halted instinctively.

A slow moment drummed by, while the two stood side by side, trying to trace form and detail in the dark mass. It had been high thin moonlight the night before when Haverley had grappled with Don Lugo in the hacienda dooryard—the thought flashed through his mind, irrelevant to the thing before them. Then that had all happened at late night or early morning; he had wondered at the time. There was no sign of moonlight now across the cañon walls.

"We have little time," Juan's voice breathed at his ear.

The boy's hand plucked at his sleeve to lead him on. Evidently Juan knew something of the place. It was well that he did.

THEY edged closer; details became dully visible. Haverley saw that a high porch ran across the front of the building, a porch with a ragged patch of sky cutting into the roof of it, as he looked up—some gaping hole in the shingles that had never been mended. The boy led on, to mount a flight of uneven steps. Step by step they went up, testing each slowly. Then warped planks lay under their boot soles. With a hand Haverley pushed Juan behind him, and he felt a return gesture of the boy—a door evidently opened down the porch to the right. Juan's fingers lingered on his arms, guiding him.

It was strange, it occurred to Haverley, that the building was dark. Lugo and Gydon would have nothing to fear, as they would reason it. They had left him safely imprisoned at the Ardillero under guard; they would expect trouble from no one else. Nothing to fear, yet still the house was without light. Was it possible, then, that they had gone on to White Ledge? . . . . Yet some feeling which he could not define told Haverley that the house was not deserted, and he realized at the same time that from within Juan's figure and his own would be plainly discernible.

His hand reached out and felt along the side wall—rough unplaned timber;

then boards nailed against it crosswise. Here, apparently, a window had been boarded up. He felt on with his left hand; his right held the short carbine at the trigger guard.

Seconds passed slowly, while they moved on a step at a time, testing the boards under each advancing foot. Perhaps they had gone ten feet when Haverley's outstretched hand touched a second ridge of crude window casing. It was unboarded. He paused. His fingers felt onto the pane, down at the low near corner. The glass intact, but cracked in a spider-web of lines—minute detail flashing upon his mind. He knelt to crawl on, below the line of the sill. A door must open somewhere close ahead—

A thin flicker of light shot over the window from within—faint, a flitting shadow of white. Haverley lifted his head instantly, seeing nothing else, and peered inside. The light flared again, cupped, as he saw it was, in a man's hands, and died.

THE man had been bending over, apparently staring down at a long dark object, something, on the floor boards before him. The match in his hands had gone out almost instantly. Haverley had seen no more. Who the man was he had no idea.

He moved on. . . . . Again the thin light of a cupped match, and with it Haverley saw the door he looked for—a fluttering line of dull light across the porch planks ahead. The door frame was swung half open toward him.

Two swift steps. He stood in the room.

Close before him the man still bent over, nursing the flame of a second match in his hands. He lifted his head. At the same time Haverley's voice came:

"Hold that match!"

The man tensed. The flame in his hands flared brighter, half illuminating his face. It was a strange face to Haverley; he had never seen it before. The face of an old man. That much shot through his mind, while his eyes held riveted on the man's tiniest movement. A breath and the match could be blown out—Haverley realized that well enough. He would have shot instantly. Things had come to that pitch. Perhaps the old man knew as much from his voice:

"Get the flame on a candle, a lamp—whatever you've got here in the room."

SUDDEN thoughts, knifelike, seemed to twitch simultaneously through Haverley's brain. Who was this old man? What did he have to do with the thing, a stranger? What did he have to do with Dolores being brought here, held in safekeeping? What was that figure on the floor, its whole length covered by a blanket?

The old man stood up slowly, calmly. He seemed about to speak. Then he shuffled toward a littered table, hesitant, as though the room were unfamiliar to him. His hands spread out to throw the light before him, searching. Slowly he bent and touched the flame to a candle stuck in a bottle's neck.

The light sputtered, lifted, and sent a circle of glow into the room. The man turned and lifted his hands at no command, elbows sagging down. Apparently he was experienced in things of this kind; his eyes showed no great surprise at what had happened. They were washed-out blue eyes, Haverley saw, set in a grizzled, weathered face.

Haverley glanced about the room. It was large, barn-like, without ceiling; the corners were left in shadow and, overhead, shadow filled the space where the rafters ran up to the roof peak. A sagging bar, speaking the heritage of the place, ran across one full side wall. . . . . Haverley's eyes turned to the blanket-covered figure on the floor.

What was that figure shrouded with a blanket? The thought quivered in his mind. Somebody dead? Dead! Was that in any way the explanation of the dark house? . . . . Haverley went swiftly toward it. His fingers touched the blanket. The thing below was lifeless; he felt that much. He threw the blanket back and tossed it to one side.

Don Lugo Ardillero, stiffened with death, lay before him.

HAVERLEY realized then what he had done. For the first time the old man spoke:

"Stick 'em up, feller!"

A blue-glinting forty-five rested in his gnarled right hand—it had appeared from a shoulder holster below his left vest wing with a trained, automatic precision, lightning-quick, in the time it had taken Haverley to throw the blanket aside.

"Stick 'em up, feller!"

Haverley whirled. There was nothing

else to do—he let the carbine slip from his fingers.

"Who are you?" he asked fiercely.

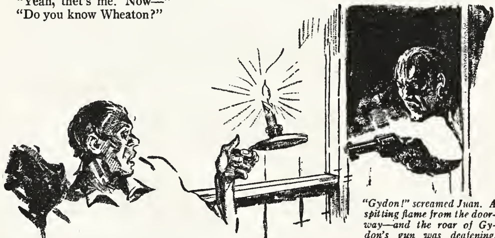
"Wa-al, now, thet's a fair question. My name's Joe Anderson. Maybe you heard of me. Me, I been sheriff round these-hyar parts for nigh some time, I reckon. Ef it aint too much, who're you, an' what d'you know 'bout him thar?"

So much, while the name came drumming into Haverley's ears—*Joe Anderson!*

"Joe Anderson!" he said aloud.

"Yeah, thet's me. Now—"

"Do you know Wheaton?"



"Gydon!" screamed Juan. A spitting flame from the doorway—and the roar of Gydon's gun was deafening.

"Cunnel Wheaton? Yeah, reckon I do so. Now who—"

"I'm Haverley—Jim Haverley! Wheaton sent me in to the Ardillero. Goin' to buy it—" He rushed into a swift torrent of explanation.

The Sheriff listened, and seemed to consider this carefully, to weigh it mentally. The sun-cracked lids over his mild blue eyes blinked.

"Huh!" he said. "Wa-al, pussonly I jist arrived hyar 'bout five minutes back, jist gittin' my bearin's. I'd reckoned from truck tracks headin' inter the cañon hyar thet a new bootleg outfit had started up on me. . . . . Say, thet's Lugo Ardillero lyin' thar, aint it?"

"Yes," Haverley replied.

FAR away, a vibrant low roar throbbed on the night air, faintly audible within the barn-like room that had once been a dance-hall. The Sheriff heard it, cocking his head to one side.

"Car comin'," he said.

The sound died; then again it came, stronger, louder—barking staccato detonations blended into one sound with distance; the roar of heavy engines grinding into an uphill grade.

"Cars," said Joe Anderson again.

Then somewhere across the big room a knock rattled on the unfinished walls—the *click-click* of bare knuckles beating heavy boards. It seemed to come from over where a door marked the wall behind the bar. Both men heard it, both turned. Anderson seemed about to speak again. Once more the knock-beating. A voice, muffled by the wall, cried some name—

The sound was drowned in a shout from Juan and the scrape of a boot-heel.

"Gydon!"—one word from Juan, fairly screamed.

Haverley saw merely a flash, a glimpse of Gydon's face in the doorway behind them—a second face over Gydon's shoulder. Darkness! The room went suddenly black, as Juan's hand snuffed the candle.

A little spitting flame snapped out from the doorway. The roar of Gydon's gun was deafening within the room.

CHAPTER VIII

"GOT yore gun ag'in yet?" whispered Joe Anderson in Haverley's ear.

"Yes. Where's Juan? —Juan!" Haverley called softly.

"Sí, señor—"

A second flame spurted at the edge of the doorway. The room vibrated with the roar. Two swift shots cannonaded as one at Haverley's side—Anderson shot at the flash, leaping away from the point where he had stood. Haverley dropped flat to the floor planks.

Silence again. Silence so still that he could hear the faint nasal wheeze of the old Sheriff's breathing, somewhere over to the left. Silence, while the wheeze marked the passing of seconds. . . . . Then again that vibrant low roar of motors, as they swung clear around some bend, pulsing through the cañon. The sound had suddenly grown close.

These things Haverley's mind recorded, while one thought ran through his mind: The door over there behind the old bar . . . . . bare knuckles beating against it, and the voice that they had both heard, yet neither had understood. So much—it meant but one thing to him. He began to creep toward that tiny nasal wheeze, as before he had crept down the porch. He touched the Sheriff's arm, bringing his lips against the old man's ear.

"I'm going to break for that door behind the bar."

Joe Anderson heard; he felt the Sheriff's head wag understanding, and he felt the old body tense.

They went into action together. Thunderclaps filled the bare room—shots being fired from heavy revolvers simultaneously, echoes crashing one upon the other until the rough side walls vibrated with the sound. In the black of the room Haverley catapulted into the bar. By the time he had swung over and was feeling along the wall for the door, the cannonading had ceased, broken off as sharply as it had begun. He breathed the pungent odor, almost stifling, of fresh powder-smoke.

THE door came under his hand—a latch that he found was broken. He jiggled the useless thing up and down, plunging his weight against the door-planks. They were solid as the walls of the room. He bunched his shoulders and struck the door—again and again, before he realized the futility of his action. The door of course was locked; what held it did not matter. It would have to be broken down.

From the open doorway a belated shot boomed. Significantly, he realized that it spat out into the night, rather than into the room. Joe Anderson had come to hold the doorway then. For an instant he paused and put his ear to the planks before him.

"Dolores!" he called.

The revolver boomed from the doorway again.

"Dolores!"

"It is really you, then, señor?" he heard a voice say in Spanish, as close to the planks as his own. "It is really you?"

It was her voice.

"Lie to the floor!" he took time to shout, before he ran down the bar.

"JUAN!" he called, and the boy's voice answered him. "Help me swing the table on the door."

The litter of the table top fell on the floor under his hand. Two bottles crashed together and shattered.

"Git it over with," Joe Anderson's old voice said in its matter-of-fact tone. "Yo're goin' to be needed here right soon, I reckon."

Haverley heard the words, as he heard the heavy nearing pound of the motors in the night—none of the diminuendo in the sound now; the machines were climbing the flat from the wash. He lifted the table; carried it down along the bar. Again he had to wait, while he felt in the darkness to once more locate the frame of the door. Juan was just behind him.

"Now, Juan—together. Swing it!"

The bar was too close, blocking a free swing. They raised the clumsy homemade table and battered with what seemed to Haverley slight effect, something insignificant, while time, passing, seemed infinite. Juan's breath came in short gasps.

Then, from outside, a sudden sweeping wave of white light shot over the building. The single unboarded window and the door flashed into white outline. For an instant the great bare room was dully illuminated. Two shots, almost as one, boomed outside. . . . . The light was gone, and Joe Anderson, at the doorway, cursed in a monotone.

Voices shouted above the rattle of the motors. Haverley heard them, interspaced between the battering crashes of the table. Seconds passed. A leg of the table broke off. Then again the light slowly swung, centering full on the window and the open doorway, and held there motionless. Dull glow flooded the room. Haverly saw Juan's strained face. Back, the crouching form of Joe Anderson. And as they swung the table again, he saw what held the door—a padlock, fastened high above in scrap-iron loops.

How his searching fingers had missed it, he did not know. That was past—wasted effort. He gave it no thought. The thing

was easy now. Juan, following his movement, dropped the table. A step down the bar, and Haverley took up the carbine again. He put the muzzle up, carefully, slowly. . . . . The following shot split the lock open.

The thing seemed faintly ironic, for before Haverley could touch it, the door swung open of its own accord. He followed.

The reflected light, through the doorway into this outroom, was thin as hazy starlight. Evidently the room was small, probably a store-pantry for the old bar. If it had windows, they were boarded. . . . . He felt her hand touch his sleeve. She stood at his side. Then he turned and led her out, and motioned for her to crouch below the heavy bar. That would be the safest place.

Her face, piquant, small, white, as he had seen it behind the broad casements of the window at the hacienda, looked up into his. Haverley turned, motioned Juan to stay with her, and dodged over to Joe Anderson's side.

"I'VE had this Jeff Gydon listed as a bad-un since he first come to squat up in these-hyar diggin's," said Joe Anderson. "Me an' him had a little run-in once before. He knows me, no question he don't. . . . . Say, aint them lights a cuss. Calculate maybe I'd better have a try at 'em. Four eyes! They's worse'n searchlights."

"I'll use the rifle," Haverley said.

"Good. Say, you well stocked fer shells? I'm gittin' low. Only had little better'n half a belt with me."

"I've got five," Haverley told him.

The Sheriff chuckled, in a mirthless, dry little laugh.

"Then be keerful, feller. Winder'll give you a better peek at 'em. By the way, consider yoreself deputized by me."

Haverley had leaped across the streak of doorway light. From a side he smashed the jagged remaining fingers of glass from the window frame. A shot cut in and plunked into the far wall of the room. Anything that moved was a target in that light. . . . . Haverley paused a moment, considering; then moved back to the center of the room. Less light there. The carbine came to his shoulder; he edged sidewise, slowly, until the first of the four bright globes shone into his eyes. The sights of the carbine silhouetted down the barrel. He pressed the trigger, and dropped to the floor.

"Good!" said Joe Anderson's dry voice. Evidently the old man had found a wall crack or bullet hole to peer through. A sudden fusillade of shots followed, spattering into the house walls.

"They's all chimin' in now," said the Sheriff.

As Haverley got to his feet again, he noticed for the first time that a man was down, over on the far edge of the porch. He saw the dark form through the doorway, the man's face upturned, the light glaring over it. For a moment the figure held his attention. It was the *cholo* Chino. Chino, then, he decided, must have cut across country for here sometime shortly behind Juan and himself. And his must have been the face behind Gydon's in the doorway.

The third light Haverley missed, and to a fast rain of shots beating into the walls, the second truck began to back off, its engine roaring, the heavy wheels churning into the soil. A hundred yards back it paused. Its lights were still bright against the porch.

"Don't try no more," said Joe Anderson. "We aint got the shells." After a moment his voice came again: "Come here, Haverley."

Haverley dodged to his side, and flattened out on the floor-planks.

"I'm hit up here, high in the left shoulder," said Anderson. "It's bleedin'. See if you can tie it up."

Haverley began to rip off his shirt.

"When?" he asked.

"When you was batterin' the door."

Suddenly Haverley realized that Dolores was beside them, her purpose plain. He saw the Sheriff nod in the dim light.

"Yeah. Git back of the bar ag'in to do it. Run, gal; I'll foller."

THEN he sat alone at the side of the door, the carbine with two shells in his hands. Minutes dragged. Then night was silent outside, no shooting now; the thing had turned into a waiting game apparently. Through the wall crack that had evidently been Joe Anderson's lookout, he saw a figure dodge before the truck lights. . . . . Shortly Joe Anderson was back at his side.

"Wonder what the game is?" Haverley asked after a moment. "If I was Gydon, I'd be makin' a get-away now. We can

hold out here until daylight, if we're careful. Then it'll be our advantage."

"Yeah," the Sheriff agreed. "But Gydon wont make a get-away—after this. See! Not while I'm alive. Reckon he knows thet. . . . . No, Gydon is in too deep, he's got to see the thing through now—with Lugo murdered, an' the rest of it."

"I don't see—" Haverley said.

"No? Wall, they's a phone at White Ledge, don't fergit; is thet down, they's still a good road an' means of gittin' out to the railroad right behind them slow trucks. The minute they draws off, or we gits out, I hits fer thet phone, see? One passable road leadin' out 'long the desert—I kin git word out 'fore they could run inter the main highways beyond an' lose themselves. See? If they'd hit 'cross the mountains, on foot or ridin', by mawnin' they'd be posses ready to greet 'em at the far side. . . . . Them things is what Gydon will be calculatin' now. Much as I dislike sayin' it, it's a case of us gittin' him, or him cleanin' us out. He's in deep enough to hang already. An' wipin' us out, he has a week, or maybe more, 'fore anybody will be likely to chance up this way an' find what's happened."

HAVERLEY slowly measured this in its full significance, measured the full desperate motive behind it all. This was a show-down, an end, one way or the other. The thing had come to the pitch of life or death. Gydon had to have time; he was in too deep now to flee or back off—and by some means he had drawn these other men in to help him. . . . . Forgotten country! Country isolated by natural boundaries until it was a trap, or, if the other thing were the end, where it would be a week, possibly, until some one stumbled by chance on what had happened.

The battle would last until the end, one way or the other. No quarter could be given. This was the show-down, the end of a thing that had grown from hands played too carelessly in a marked game, events dallying along from a far past to lift monster heads into the present. . . . . To satisfy himself, yet knowing the answer, Haverley crawled across the floor, and roughly searched Lugo's clothing. The little jewel-casket was not on him. Gydon, of course, had taken it, murdered Lugo to get it for the jewels it contained. He had evidently been planning some means of disposing of Lugo's body in the night when he had seen the light coming on in the building.

Haverley felt the Sheriff's hand on his arm.

"I smell smoke! . . . . Keerful, boy; quiet—don't let the gal hear yet."

SECONDS pounded by, silent, while the white light glared steadily across the front of the building.

"Do you smell it?" the old man's voice whispered again.

"No—not much. God, they wouldn't do that!"

"Why not?" the Sheriff's voice inquired dryly. "It'd be what I'd do if I war outside—in their fix."

In their fix! Joe Anderson had a grim, ironic sense of humor. Aloud Haverley said:

"There must be windows to the back side of the room here—boarded up. Smash out there!"

"So? Reckon they wouldn't figure on thet, huh? Reckon they wouldn't even hear thet, huh?"

The old man suddenly grasped Haverley's arm again. For a slow instant the light across the porch had faded out. Then it glared on once more—full, bright. Joe Anderson's fingers twitched.

"Somebody's drivin' stock out thar! Look—dust in the light! Thet was a cow goin' before the truck what just blotted out the glare—"

For the first time, apparently, the old man was excited. Haverley realized instantly what had happened—the *vaqueros* had just come in, driving that day's band of cattle to meet the trucks. He told Joe Anderson in swift words.

"Four of them?" the old man questioned.

"Yes, so Juan says. Some of them will be armed."

"Uh-huh!" The Sheriff swore in an undertone. "Ignorant *cholos!* Gydon'll do what he wants with them; he'll have them believin' Lugo's behind him soon enough, or that we killed Lugo—probably both. I know the breed, what's been drilled into 'em for the last two generations. They'd follow Lugo to the last man."

There was a bitter twang to his words. It came to Haverley that for the first time the Sheriff was counting the odds, and had found them too heavy. A cow bawled into the night outside. Wood smoke was getting heavy in the room, thick, so that the light shaft through the

To a rain of shots, the truck began to back off, its engine roaring, the heavy wheels churning the soil.

doorway had become whitely opaque, semi-solid in appearance, with heavy, slow-lifting lateral ribbons across it. . . . . Haverley did not know that Juan was beside him until the boy spoke.

"The *vaqueros, señor?*" the boy asked.

"Yes."

Haverley turned to Joe Anderson.

"I'm going to make a break outside. Let me take your gun."

He saw the Sheriff nod slowly.

"Yeah, thet's about the only way! Little enough chance!" The old man's words were calm again.

Before Haverley could move he heard Juan speak:

"No, señor"—softly.

In that instant Juan had stepped out through the door. He stood silhouetted to them, full in the white glare of the light. Joe Anderson's hand pulled Haverley back, held him. And Haverley saw Juan raise a hand, addressing an invisible audience, while he stood in the spot-light. He saw that the boy's body trembled with fear. He heard him shout in shrill Spanish, calling men, the *vaqueros,* by name:

"Manuel, Pio Garcia, Vincente—"

No more. A rifle cracked in the night beyond, and the boy sprawled suddenly forward, falling limply across the body of his old enemy of the whip, Chino.

For a dazed second Haverley knelt beside Joe Anderson, half standing, without motion. In that fraction of time it seemed many things flitted through his mind, images; and last, he seemed to hear again Juan's words: *"Señor,* there is something —something within that tells me to say *adios* to you now." The boy, in the end, had sacrificed everything to change the odds against them—and failed.

Haverley was not conscious of what he did. He tried to speak to Joe Anderson again, while his throat seemed swelled so that words would not come. He merely knew that he took the revolver from the Sheriff's right hand, and pushed the carbine into its place.

"Two shells!" he thought he managed to call back. "Save them!"

He was out onto the rough-planked, wabbling old porch, with the two globes of light glaring into his eyes. Then the ground beyond was under his feet. He was running, with the presence of mind to zigzag crazily in long leaps. He knew that shots were coming beyond the two globes—

pin-point yellow flashes. He saw one of the two lights spatter black before him, knew that Joe Anderson had wasted one shell there. He cursed without words.

The heavy forty-five lifted in his hand for the first time. He had gained the dark behind the spread-fan of the single remaining light, a misty darkness that was faintly gray with reflected glow.

CHAPTER IX

DETAILS of that fight swam in Haverley's mind — images, faces dimly lighted, forms moving, grappling with each other, the staccato roar and flash of guns; all swam in his mind, unreal, deformed, crazily twisted in outline, like objects far off in the desert's noontime when shimmering heat waves rise and twist the inanimate into seeming writhing movement. Time itself had no meaning; time was measured by the crack of guns, and the madness of action. Seconds or hours might have passed; it made no difference. . . . .

One thing stood out plain in his mind—the face of Jeff Gydon. It seemed to rise from nothing to meet him, plain, unmistakable. He knew that the man shot twice at him, while he went on, conscious of only that face, seeing nothing but it. Then Joe Anderson's heavy revolver lifted in his hand, and he fired. A spurt of orange-yellow flame. He saw the face twitch. He pulled the trigger again, twice more, and the gun snapped a hammer on empty cartridge heads. Useless—shells gone! He leaped on and grappled with the huge man, clawing to get a hold at his throat, while Gydon fought at him with frantic great fists. Gydon was too strong for him—the man tore loose, and was running away, stumbling off into the darkness, as Lugo had fled the night before from the hacienda dooryard. Haverley followed. . . . . No, that wouldn't do, something said. There were other things—Joe Anderson and Dolores back there. The fight wasn't over yet; he couldn't follow Gydon.

Strangely, it seemed, as he turned back, that he saw Dolores running down the fan-path of light. What was she doing here? Clearly he saw her, each minute detail, the odd, deep reddish color of her hair with white light across and into it. . . . . This thing would have to be over before she came into it. Be over with!

These things swam in Haverley's mind, images, faces, forms struggling against each other, crazy mad fighting in which he did his part, time long or short in passing, unmeasured. . . . . Then it seemed that he was quiet, for no apparent reason, resting, just waking from a troubled sleep. A voice at his side, which he recognized as Joe Anderson's, said:

"Huh, comin' round, I guess."

SLIM hands played across his forehead, cool hands. He knew that they were real.

"Huh," came Joe Anderson's voice again, "reckon he's comin' round all right. Aint bad hit—nothin' serious to a feller young as him. 'Twar a blow on the head what got him down finally."

Haverley saw the outline of Dolores' head leaning over him. Strong yellow light passed over and into the deep auburn of her hair. In the distance a tall straight pillar of fire danced up into the night, lighting the width of the cañon bottom—a rising giant flame over what had once been a dance-hall, monument to the past when new diggings had been opened in the Pinto.

Haverley lifted himself on an elbow.

"Juan," he asked. "Where's—"

"Yes, boy." Joe Anderson nodded in the fire light. "He's in the truck thar, comfortable as we kin make him. An' the kid has maybe an even chance to pull through."

Haverley felt Dolores pulling his head back until it rested on her knees again. There were other men there in the light—tall, lean and muscular fellows, dressed in the *chaparras* and flat-crowned wide hats of *vaqueros*. They were staring down at him curiously.

JOE ANDERSON was speaking again, his voice droning into nothingness; then coming back stronger, in its dry drawling tone:

"Yeah, 'twar the hoss what got Gydon in the end. A great handsome brute of a palamino, tied out thar in a fringe of brush 'long the edge of the flat. Hard hit, Gydon war, but he tried to mount an' git away. An' the hoss got him, struck him while he war reachin' for the saddle—both fore-hoofs crushin' him down. Dead! An' one of them hoofs, comin' down, hit this-hyar little box in his pocket, openin' wide. . . . . See thar. Yeah, the paper war in it, 'long with the jewels. . . . . Sure—down in thet

little metal pocket at its base. I ought to know; thet's the way I found it. . . . . Yeah, thet paper just proves what I war tellin' Wheaton, not over three or four days ago. Sure, it's a deed for half the Ardillero, made out to yore daddy, gal, by Santiago José. The thing's thirty-five or forty years old."

There was a long pause, while many thoughts rushed through Haverley's brain. The paper had been in the box then—in a little secret pocket underneath. Queer about that half dream he had had back in the sweltering little outbuilding at the Ardillero! He would have to tell Joe Anderson about that some time. Still the dream was not so queer either. Maybe it wasn't just a dream after all; maybe he had more or less figured the thing out in a half-dreaming mind, figured that Lugo was after more than just a handful of jewels or the value of the box. And when Haverley had got the box Lugo hadn't known how much he had seen, or come to know. That had started the thing. . . . . After all, it didn't matter how it had happened. Lugo had attempted to clean out the Rancho Ardillero, even to secretly selling off the cattle. How near he had come to doing it all, or how far, didn't matter. The east half of the Ardillero belonged to Dolores now, anyway.

DOLORES was speaking to Joe Anderson: "Yes, the casket was the last gift of the Señora to me. She had it brought from Lugo's safe and gave it to me just before she died. She said that it was all my inheritance, and for me to keep it. That was all, the last she ever said. . . . . Of course I knew I had an interest in the Ardillero from my father, but I had no reason to think that Lugo would try to steal it from me. We were brought up together, like brother and sister. The jewels in the box were, after all, more his than mine. That is why I would have given them to him. They aren't of great value."

After a time Joe Anderson laughed in a dry, mirthless chuckle.

"Not much value, huh?" he said. And after a while: "I most wish Gydon had lived to sell 'em. Huh! I suppose it war Lugo's actions what give him the idear they was worth a fortune—or murder."

Joe Anderson's voice went on and on, and at length it died away, while Haverley considered what he had heard. Dolores owned the east half of the Ardillero! Wheaton would have to buy it from her, if he got it. Maybe she wouldn't sell. That would make Wheaton lose out. Lose out, when Wheaton already owned the west half. . . . . He considered that for what seemed a long while.

It started another thought whirling in his mind: If Wheaton made his profit, wouldn't he sell the west half? It was just an investment to Wheaton. If he made his profit, he'd just as soon sell as buy. Why not? . . . . Why not buy that west half from Wheaton? He, Haverley, had money—some—from the Bar Triangle deal, enough to make likely first payments. Why not? That ought to work out. No reason why it wouldn't.

He thought it all over again. No, no reason why that wouldn't work out. He came to a swift conclusion: He'd have to see—see Dolores about it.

He tried to sit up. Funny how a fellow could think so well, and yet couldn't make his muscles work like they ought to. He could see her head just over him, the yellow frame of light over deep auburn hair. She was saying tenderly:

"You mustn't try to get up. Mr. Anderson is getting the truck started. We'll lift you in. . . . . No, you mustn't get up. I know you can, but I wont let you."

So that was it. Oh, well, he could talk just as well lying down!

BEHIND the shadows of the truck one of the Ardillero *vaqueros* was speaking to another in soft, vibrant Spanish:

"The Señor Stranger is truly a tiger. *Madre de Dios*, how he fought!"

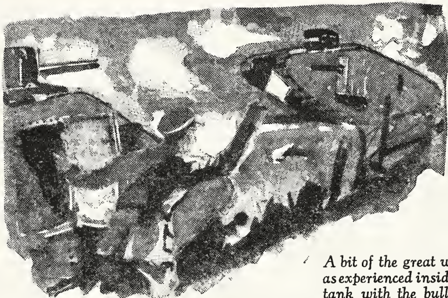
"Si, amigo," the other answered, "yet if it had not been for Juan, and after him the Señorita, I would never have known on which side to fight. The Señor Gydon was as great a liar as this man is a fighter."

"Si, true words, Pio Garcia. Think you also that the stranger is a *caballero?"*

"Truly so, the way he fights. *Amigo*, with Don Lugo gone, it seems that such a one would be a fitting new master for the Ardillero. Think you so?"

"Good words, they seem, Pio Garcia. And perhaps that will be. Look you carefully, Pio Garcia, over yonder. Do you not see as I do—the Señorita's lips on his? That is a good omen, it would seem."

THE END.



A bit of the great war as experienced inside a tank with the bullets drumming on its walls.

Tanks in Action

By Stephen F. Annett

OF all the stories written about the War, I remember reading none about the tanks which was at all authentic. Few people outside the actual members of the Tank Corps knew anything about the machines or how they were operated, which perhaps contributes somewhat to the mystery surrounding them.

Founded in 1916, the British Tank Corps took part in nearly every major action from then until the armistice was signed. At first only the larger type of tank was used, the kind so well known to every newspaper reader; but in 1918 the "whippet" made its appearance, whose object was to replace the heavier, slower machine with one of faster type, capable of getting ahead of the infantry and cutting off the retreating enemy.

On returning to my battalion from leave in 1918, I found that its name had become the 3rd Light Tank Battalion, and I was forthwith initiated into the mysteries of the whippet with its double engines and other changes in equipment. Among many other things I found that the steering was accomplished by turning a wheel after the same manner as a car is steered. This steering-wheel was attached to the throttles of the two engines, so that if the driver wished to turn to the left he really shut off his left-hand engine and opened up the right-hand one. This formed the main drawback of the whippet, for if, when pulling up out of a deep trench, the driver turned his wheel, there was a very real danger of "choking" one engine and thus cutting down his motive power just when it was most needed. The engine then could not be restarted without cranking, which was not always possible.

WE got our final orders on August 19, 1918, for the biggest "show" we had yet taken part in. One battalion of heavy tanks were to lie out in No-man's land to start at zero and proceed in advance of the infantry as far as the first objective, which just included Logeast Wood, where they were to stop to refill with fuel and ammunition, while a second wave of heavies passed on to the next objective.

The work of the whippets was to push

along behind the second wave so as to reach their objective with them and then to race ahead, cut off and silence the German batteries in front of and around Achiet-le-Petit. We started our advance march two days before the show. Soon after sundown we set out from the "tankodrome," where we had reëquipped, and traveled along tracks and byroads all night.

The whippet was manned by an officer, a driver and a gunner. On the forward march the officer usually felt out the road ahead so as to give warning in case of shell-holes, ditches or things of a like nature. In this instance we proceeded in "battle-line ahead," one tank behind the other like a huge circus. At this time I was in charge of four tanks, two of which were managed by N. C. O.'s, the other by another officer, and the fourth by myself, so that I was kept busy seeing after minor troubles, keeping touch with the rest of the column, and so on.

Just as daylight was breaking we pulled in under the trees of an orchard and camouflaged ready to refill and complete any minor repairs, so that by the time the first enemy plane came sailing over we were all safely tucked away and all tracks leading to the orchard eliminated by dragging them over with harrows and brushwood.

THE next night was occupied in moving forward to our position immediately behind Bucquoy, where supplies and ammunition were already stacked in readiness under the ubiquitous camouflage net. Only one thing occurred of any consequence that night. As usual, when approaching the line, halts were of frequent occurrence, after each of which we would hurry forward in order to keep in touch with those ahead, as no lights were allowed and no shouting. After one such halt I was hurrying forward, using the glowing end of a cigarette as a signal torch, when without warning I stumbled headlong into a deep shell-crater. The first tank was close behind me, and although the night was dark, the sky was clear enough to enable me to see the huge bulk of the monster rearing up over the ridge of the crater right above my head. To say I scrambled out would be incorrect; I scurried out of that hole like a jack-rabbit out of a sand-pit, just as the tank came crashing down into it to the accompaniment of the most unholy oaths my driver was capable of. Apologies were out of the question. I think, however, that was the only time I had ever let him down in that way.

AT zero-hour we walked over behind the infantry, still in "battle-line ahead." All the actual fighting was on in front so that there was nothing to get at all excited about. In fact we strolled along with scarcely a stop right through the pile of bricks which was called Bucquoy, and over the shell-torn ground toward Logeast Wood. An enemy machine-gun had been placed at one corner, and two of the crew were still there, one sitting helpless with both legs smashed, and the other huddled over with his head twisted under his chest. I dragged the wounded man aside, as his legs were right in the path of my tank, and received a glare from him in return which might have been either fear or hate; I have never been able to decide which.

At the farther corner of the wood I found one of our own men just coming up out of a dugout with a Luger automatic. I wanted to buy it from him, but before I had a chance to do that a burst of machine-gun fire came from the left and we both went different ways. This was our first contact with the enemy and served as a warning to prepare for action. A few hundred yards farther on we halted and gathered on the sheltered side of one of the tanks for a consultation as to ways and means. In the middle of this an infantryman came up with a message from his commander saying that they were held up with machine-guns in front of the old Canadian camp on the right, and requesting the help of a tank. The major turned to me:

"Take your four tanks down there, and when you've cleaned 'em up rejoin us," he ordered, adding: "We'll go on slowly toward Achiet-le-Petit."

I CROWDED the infantryman on board as a guide and started off to the right, telling my three other commanders to follow. By devious ways our guide brought us to a spot in front of the group of rusty iron huts which had formerly been the Canadian camp. Here the guide dropped off, after telling me that our own front line was some two or three hundred yards farther on. Accordingly we proceeded for-

ward with bullets spattering like hail on the armor-coat of the tank and neither my gunner nor myself knowing quite where to pick up our targets, as we thought ourselves still within our own lines.

With a tank the best rule is invariably: "When in doubt, go forward." To stand still is to become a target, whereas the bravest enemy will eventually give way before a steel-clad machine which is impervious to his bullets.

WE were moving at slow speed, (for every bullet which struck the outside of the hull chipped a red-hot spark from the inside, making an approach to the peep-holes almost impossible), when we struck a deep and wide trench. We fell into it with a bone-jarring crash and then started to climb the farther side. The machine-gun fire had stopped, but it was too late to survey the bank in front, and so we just climbed. Then, of course, we started to side-slip. There had been a heavy fog all morning which had made visibility bad and had also drenched the grass with dew, making the clay-bank very slippery. When the tank began to slip to the side, I called to my driver to wait while I locked both transmissions, but my voice was drowned in the roar of the engines and the noise of the machine-gun, for the gunner was in action with an enemy machine-gun crew near-by.

Then the inevitable occurred. In trying to pull over to the right, the driver "choked" the right engine. There was still a chance of pulling out on one engine if only I could lock the transmission. We worked with care. First we pulled around to an upright position and then began to maneuver with the lock, which was not easy to work. We were on the verge of making it, when with a stutter the engine died and we were ditched.

In such an event there was but one thing to do. We climbed out and I instructed the men to get out their machine-guns and hold the position while I signaled for help. I clambered up the side of the trench and saw my other three machines in action off to the left. Wreathed in smoke and spitting fire as they were, I had little hope of their seeing us. Among other things, we had been issued with a number of colored flags for signaling purposes, and diving into the tank, which was now coming in for considerable attention from the batteries in front, I grabbed one of these flags and once more mounted the parapet. Then, for the first time, I saw the trap we were in. Evidently our guide had been misinformed as to the position of our front line, or else our men had fallen back, for we were completely surrounded by the enemy. I had just time to wave my flag, when I felt a kick in the side and threw myself down as close to mother-earth as I could get while a storm of bullets whined low over me.

Carefully I felt my side. My belt was torn and my tunic gashed and soaked in blood. From my position I cautiously gazed around and there, coming right toward me, was a whippet. I waited until he was opposite and then, as he passed, he threw open his door. I jumped up and in, to the accompaniment of a hail of lead, all of which went wide.

The junior officer was in charge and I instructed him to swing around in front of my tank in order to pull it out, but that trench was fated to stop us. In the act of crossing, although his driver used every care, his engines stopped. Once more we climbed out and set up our machine-guns, but the Germans evidently found two tanks too many, together with our infantry pressing from behind, for they quickly fell back, and khaki figures came crowding up around us.

LEAVING them, I made my way along the trench in the direction of my own tank, but before I had gone a dozen yards I met my driver with one arm and shoulder shattered, and crying like a child with shell-shock. He told me that the enemy had rushed them with bombs and driven them back into the arms of our advancing infantry. The gunner had been killed outright.

By this time I had become weak enough to "hand over" to the other officer and make my way back, with my wounded driver, to where the stretcher-bearers were advancing with the next wave of infantry. There I found I had been shot with an explosive bullet which had left a hole in my side big enough to contain a whole field-dressing—hence the weakness.

That was the last I saw of France. Three days later a nurse on the hospital train from Southampton to London read me the account of how the tanks had again covered themselves with glory by reaching every one of their objectives exactly as planned.

Daggers and Dollars

By

Ernest J. Sharpsteen

He was a very amateur detective, indeed, but he contrived to solve the strange mystery of Justin Ames' murder.

I GUESS most every male being goes through practically the same line of experience in growing from a child into manhood, and I was no exception to the rule.

I think the first real foolish thing I ever did in trying to select a vocation that was to be my life's work: at the age of about six, I jumped off the roof of the barn with the family umbrella, trying to qualify as an aviator; but as it was with all you other chaps who have done the same thing, the umbrella turned wrong-side out, and I came down with disastrous results both to myself and the aforesaid umbrella.

From the umbrella stage I drifted along to the magician period when I invested all my spare dimes into fool-proof apparatus, and was quite the neighborhood sensation until I aspired to outdo Houdini in a sensational handcuff escape at a church entertainment: I probably would be there yet, if some one hadn't been able to find the keys to the handcuffs and relieve me from my predicament.

At different periods I also tried rope-walking on the family clothesline, juggling with Mother's best dishes and so forth, until I was either cured by ridicule, or by a well placed razor-strop in the hands of my father.

All these things appear very foolish to me now when I look back upon them; but after we have grown to an age when we ought to have sense enough to know better, we still continue to do things just as silly as the umbrella, magician, rope-walking and juggling episodes—which leads me to the time when I aspired to be a detective, and forms the substance of this story.

A NEIGHBORING town awoke one day to find itself the scene of a mysterious murder.

Justin Ames, one of the town's influential and wealthy citizens, was found lying on the floor of his private office, a look of horror in his glazed eyes, and in his heart a dagger to which was attached one of those printed pictures of a bag of money often used in bank advertisements.

No one was found who could give any logical explanation of why the murderer should go to the bother of attaching the money-bag picture, and search as they

would, no clue to the assassin, or motive for the crime, could be uncovered.

It couldn't even be definitely established as to just what hour the old fellow had met his death. He had been seen to enter his office alone at the usual hour, and no one had given him any further thought until his business partner, Samuel Wentworth, had gone in to confer with him on a matter of business shortly before closing time, and discovered his lifeless body lying face upward in a pool of blood.

The crime received the usual round of gossip and discussion, some even daring to hint that old Wentworth might have committed the crime himself.

Speculation ran rife, but no actual evidence of any kind could be uncovered, and in the course of a week or two the excitement subsided, and the town settled down to normalcy.

Then a rumor was started that Wentworth had received a card bearing the inscription, *"You are next!"* and I, then and there, without malice or forethought, decided to become a detective.

I TOOK a bus to the town and without authority, gun or credentials, called at the office of Ames & Wentworth, to interview Samuel Wentworth.

I was told that Mr. Wentworth was not in, and upon further inquiry learned that the old gentleman had been suffering from an attack of nerves since his partner's death, and would probably be found at home.

I told the girl in the office I was making a private investigation of the Ames case, and would like to go over the scene of the murder. (Having read detective stories, I felt this was the proper thing to do.)

The girl politely ushered me into the private office, pointed out the position the body had occupied, then returned to her duties in the outer office.

I went over the room thoroughly, looking for a clue—that is, I suppose I was looking for one. I might have been hoping to find a photograph of the criminal containing his name and permanent address; but like better detectives before me, I discovered nothing.

My next move was to ask the girl where I could find the home of Mr. Wentworth, and I was informed that he lived all alone —his wife having recently died—in the old family homestead just south of town; and after the proper directions had been given me, I started out to find it, still fully determined upon securing my interview.

The girl had informed me that once started on the right street, I couldn't possibly miss the place, and this information was entirely correct.

It was one of those big, old-fashioned houses. You know—one of those places that you could tell by the number of additions built onto it just how many children there had been in the family.

It was set way back from the road, inside a stone wall with a big iron gate, and the graveled path was lined on each side by a row of tall pine trees that sighed and moaned in the breeze as I passed under them.

After a repeated knocking on the front door I finally heard sounds of movement within; the curtain of the door was pushed aside a trifle, and an eye cautiously peered out.

There was another short wait; then the door slowly opened, and a man stood before me.

He was fully but not very well dressed. A man along in his sixties, of rather rugged build, and with a pair of eyes whose piercing glance seemed to look clear through me.

A trifle different, he seemed, than I had pictured Mr. Wentworth would look, but this was the right house, so I had no doubt of the identity of the man before me.

"Mr. Wentworth, I believe," was my first remark as I extended my hand.

HE gazed at me intently for a moment then answered, "Yes," but did not offer to take my hand.

He didn't appear very friendly, nor extend an invitation to enter, but I went in anyway, and immediately launched into the subject of my visit.

After a good bit of preliminary questioning to which I received vague and rather unsatisfying answers, while the object of my questions kept gazing furtively about, I asked:

"Have you any idea, Mr. Wentworth, as to who could have murdered Justin Ames, or do you know of any motive for the crime?"

There was a moment's pause, while the man looked at me intently with what seemed an almost insane light in his eyes;

then he launched forth with what sounded more like a confession than an imagined reason for the crime.

AMES and Wentworth, some years previous, had recommended certain mining stock, and had then invested in it the life-savings of a man named Morris.

The venture had proved most disastrous for Morris, however, and his entire capital had been wiped out, leaving him well along in years, and penniless. Of course it was the fault of Ames and Wentworth, and Morris had sworn to be avenged.

Justin Ames had been marked as the first victim, and was craftily disposed of. Samuel Wentworth was the next.

"Morris is the guilty man," said my narrator, "and the motive is justifiable revenge!" And he slowly raised his right hand as though calling upon God to be his witness.

As he did so, I sprang from my chair and started back in horror and surprise, for the fingers and palm of that right hand were a fresh, wet crimson!

"Mr. Wentworth!" I exclaimed. "Your hand is covered with blood! Are you hurt?"

He looked at his hand, then at me, and replied calmly:

"No, I was just engaged in dressing a chicken when you called. Please excuse me while I wash my hands." And he vanished through a door leading to the rear of the house.

POSSIBLY it was not more than twenty minutes that I waited, although it seemed like hours. Once I thought I heard the sound of something being dragged across a floor, and again I fancied I heard a door slam, but nothing more.

I began to get nervous. I rose and paced the floor for a time, then I stopped and listened. I could hear nothing. I debated whether to leave quietly by the front door and sneak back to town, or explore the house to see what had become of Mr. Wentworth. I finally decided to explore.

First I called his name, and receiving no reply, I went through the door that he had used when I last saw him, and found myself in a small hallway with a door on either side, and one straight ahead, which I judged would be the kitchen.

This surmise was correct, but the kitchen proved to be empty.

I looked around to see if I could find the chicken Mr. Wentworth had been dressing, and found nothing; but a ray of bright sunshine coming through the kitchen window drew my attention to a pool of blood upon the floor. This was somewhat smeared into a short trail that led to a door to my left, evidently the door to the pantry.

With a feeling of terror arising within me, I crossed to this door, and threw it open.

Emitting a horrified yell, I jumped hastily aside, for out tumbled the body of a man I had never seen before, with a dagger in his heart, and to its handle was attached the picture of a bag of money!

I rushed to the phone and summoned the local police; then, armed with a stove-poker, I explored the house, the barn and all the out-buildings, in an effort to find and capture Wentworth, but entirely without success.

SOON the sheriff and a deputy arrived. I met them at the front door of the house, and explained that I had solved the Ames murder mystery. "He was killed by his own partner, Samuel Wentworth," I exclaimed, "who has just disappeared after committing another murder." And I took them to the kitchen to view the body.

The sheriff took one look at the body, then looked at me and said, "Say, are you crazy? *This* is Wentworth!"

I had called just at the time Morris was wreaking his insane desire for revenge upon Samuel Wentworth, and he no doubt would have finished me too had I not mistaken him for Wentworth and thus given him a cue to go by.

His recital of the motive for revenge had been his own true story.

Morris was captured later and sentenced for life to an institution for the criminally insane; but it was not I, but a real, long-experienced detective who trailed him down, although I am conceited enough to admit that he was caught through my description.

I do not make my living as a detective. This one experience cured me, just as I was cured of the other things earlier in life by the razor-strop, the ridicule and the broken umbrella.

The Parade

By **Harvey Warde**

You will find plenty of real humor in this quaint story, which describes one of the strangest parades ever staged.

FLORIANOPOLIS, capital of the state of Santa Catarina, Brazil, was in a ferment that year. John Grumichè was building the new houses of Congress; Grossenbacher and Trinks were installing the first telephone-system; and we were doing the biggest job ever done in the state—supplying the city with water. More important than all these, though, Grossenbacher and Trinks had imported an automobile from the United States.

It was the first car ever seen in that state and was one of the best obtainable at that time. One peculiarity was that it ran on an "accumulator" instead of a battery. The only bad feature was that it needed the services of an expert to keep it in order and there was only one man, a Pole named John Ligocki, who knew anything at all about gas-engines, and he worked for us.

He was a real expert, a born mechanic; and so long as he was available, Grossenbacher and Trinks were able to ride around the city, the admired of all admirers.

One day, after a protracted session with the car, Ligocki came to me and whispered: "I guess that you'll be able to buy that car pretty cheap soon."

"Why should I buy it if it wont run?" I asked.

"I can make it go when you've bought it," came the reply. "It only needs the engine taking down and reassembling."

Sure enough, after about a month spent in struggling with the car and the services of many so-called experts, Trinks came to me and offered to sell the car.

"Only at a junkman's price," I told him.

"Any price at all will suit me," said Trinks, who was thoroughly disgusted with his purchase.

The bargain was soon made, and after delivery, Ligocki set to work and quickly had the machine in running order again.

We learned to drive—which was all we ever did do; and we drove around gathering up the fame attaching to the owners of a self-propelled vehicle.

WITH victory came conceit, and when it became necessary for us to go to Aguas Mornas, about a hundred and twenty miles away, we left Ligocki behind.

The road was a poor one but fairly passable for automobiles, and we arrived there safely, transacted our business and started the return journey.

We had done about thirty or forty miles when suddenly the car, for no reason we could imagine, stopped dead. We got out and examined it. There was plenty of gas, and everything else seemed to be all right, but the car just stuck; and nothing we could do would budge it. We tried everything we knew and many things we only guessed at, but nothing availed us; and finally, after getting grease all over my nicely laundered white clothes, I lassoed a horse from a near-by field and rode it bareback for ten miles to fetch a blacksmith who we hoped could do something.

The blacksmith came, took a good look at the engine and promptly announced that he could do nothing, and that his fee would be two milreis.

We paid him and he departed, leaving the pair of us too disgusted even to curse. Finally by promising what to him was a fabulous fortune, we persuaded a big darky to unyoke his oxen from a plow and haul us home—and so the parade started out.

First came the oxen yoked together, while beside them strode the negro using his ox-goad to speed them up and guide them. After that came the car, with me sitting at the steering-wheel and my partner sitting disgustedly beside me.

IT took us four days to reach the ferry-station from which we could embark for the city which is on an island; and the whole countryside turned out to cheer us on our way.

But much worse humiliation was in store for us. Some idiot at the ferry station had phoned John Grumiche, our rival contractor (though a very friendly rival), about the strange procession heading for the capital; and John had gone to great pains to assemble a fitting reception committee for our arrival.

John's hobby, when he wasn't working, was what he called a "Foo-Foo" band of fifty to sixty stark naked little darky boys with bamboo instruments, and paper and combs. The kids had applied to him several times for uniforms, or at least to be allowed to wear some clothes, but even a pocket handkerchief was sternly forbidden.

In addition to the band, John had collected Grossenbacher and Trinks, from whom we had purchased—or rather stolen—the car, together with a number of civic dignitaries all very hot and solemn in top hats and frock coats, while John himself, with a walking-stick, acted as drum major of the band.

All Florianopolis was out to greet us. It doesn't take much in Brazil to get a crowd for anything but work, and this was a glorious occasion, for we were, at that time, by far the most prominent persons in the community.

AS we were hauled off the ferry, John vigorously waved his walking-stick and the band struck up a weird rendering of the Brazilian national anthem. Every little nigger boy was bursting his chest to see which could produce the strangest noise and after the tune was ended the parade formed.

I'd gladly give a thousand dollars for a photograph of that procession! First came Grossenbacher and Trinks—all agrin at the thought of the splendid revenge they were having; then followed the civic dignitaries, and after them the oxen patiently towing the car while the ox-driver guided them with pricks from his goad.

In the car we sat, each looking more like a darned fool than I ever wish to do again, and after the machine followed Grumiche, vigorously waving the stick to the band, whlch was achieving wonders of discordance, while a cheering throng of people surged about and along the whole procession.

When we finally managed to get rid of the crowd, and the speechmaking, kidding and chaffing were ended, we had the car hauled to the yard, where it was kept and paid off the driver with the oxen. Then we summoned Ligocki to discover what was wrong with the car.

A single glance was enough for him.

"Gosh!" he grunted scornfully. "You didn't charge your accumulator, and of course it ran down!"

Who Ate the Ears?

By

David M. Newell

An unusual sports-story engagingly narrated by a wild-animal expert.

ANYONE who has had much to do with animals knows that there are certain general rules governing animal behavior. The stock-farmer, for instance, knows that when a cow has once found a break in a fence, she will forever after hang around that particular piece of fence in hopeful expectation of finding another break. The hog-farmer knows that an old boar can be soothed into a gentle mood and eventually be coaxed into a reclining position by having his ribs scratched. The kennel-man knows that a chicken-killing pointer and a sheep-killing hound are hard cases. But the more experience a man has with animals, the more he becomes aware that there are outstanding exceptions to all rules.

I was raised on a farm. I have extracted, in my time, several hundred thousand gallons of milk from various cows of various dispositions. I have cared for all sorts of hogs—from blooded Durocs to scrub razorbacks and "pineywoods" rooters that could "drink out of a jug," or, as the old darky put it, "stick they noses two feet in de ground an' den be lookin' right straight at you."

I also have had more or less experience with horses, from blooded Irish hunters at the Eastern hunt-clubs, to Florida cow ponies and Arizona "broomies." I have owned as many as forty-six dogs at one and the same time, and I have found that on the whole domestic animals generally act according to rules, under certain given circumstances. This also is true of wild animals, a fact of utmost value to a hunter, trapper, or student of natural history.

To be successful, a hunter must know the habits of wild animals. He must know that in hot weather a bear will stay close to water, in the spring will seek the berry patches, and in the fall will travel miles in search of acorns. He must know a wolf-kill from a cougar-kill. He must know when a buck deer lies in the thickets and when in the sunlit glades. He must know an otter-slide from an alligator-wallow. He must be able to distinguish between the track of a marauding house cat, and that of a bob-cat kitten. All these things and many more he must know, but in addition he must always be ready for the unexpected.

This is the story of such an occurrence. It is from personal observation; and I might say that an old cowpuncher, with whom I happened to be hunting, was even more puzzled over it than was I.

WE were camped in the upper breaks of Cedar Creek Cañon, on the northern Apache Reservation, near Fort Apache,

Arizona. I was employed by the United States Bureau of Biological Survey, Predatory Animal Service, and old Jess had temporarily put in with me, both for pleasure and profit. He had eight dogs in his pack, four of them well trained on bear and "lion," as the cougar was locally called. My pack was composed of nine hounds and two Airedales, all of which I had brought out with me from Florida.

In camp with us was Sam Adams, a Florida boy whom I had brought along to assist in handling the dogs. A fair idea of Sam's predilections may be had from his first remark when I had asked him if he wished to accompany me to Arizona.

"Go?" he gasped. "I reckon I will! I never wanted to do but two things in my life, and goin' out there panther-huntin' is ***both*** of 'em!" Sam had lived up to all expectations as a dog wrangler. In addition he had proved himself a hard and reckless rider in a bear or lion chase, and a general asset to the outfit.

Perhaps a mile from our camp was Maverick Cañon, and along the bed of this cañon there trickled a small stream. This was a favorite rendezvous for bears of all sizes and descriptions. Now a bear is not generally considered as a predatory animal, and consequently I had had instructions to hunt down only such bears as were proving themselves confirmed cattle-killers. There were undoubtedly such bears in the neighborhood, as witnessed by the occasional carcass of a cow.

It is not difficult for the experienced hunter to tell when a cow or calf has been killed by a bear, for he usually batters down his prey with smashing blows. Having killed, he will almost invariably start to eat from the head, tearing out the tongue, the eyes, and the jaw muscles. A mountain lion will first disembowel his prey, and having eaten his fill, will cover the carcass with sticks, pine-needles, and leaves. A lobo wolf always attacks from the rear, cutting the hamstring, and will usually start to eat from the flanks and hams. Moreover, each of the above predatory beasts has marked preference for certain kinds of meat. A lion's favorite food is venison and his second choice is the flesh of a colt or even a grown horse. Of course a lion will often kill calves, but he prefers horseflesh. A lobo wolf, on the other hand, prefers cattle and sheep. He is a killer by nature and will often cripple and kill several calves in a night. A meat-eating bear almost invariably kills cattle—cows or calves—and rarely if ever will molest horses or colts. These are well-known facts, and the hunter is guided by them in his work.

ONE morning in May, we rode the south rim of Maverick Cañon. Bear tracks were numerous in the gravel along the water in the cañon bed, and inasmuch as the dogs were fresh, we were not surprised to see the whole pack break away in full cry—undoubtedly on the trail of a big bear.

Sam and old Jess spurred after them, and I worked my way down through the bluffs into the cañon. The dogs swung to the south and began to ascend the cañon-side. I did not follow them, for I felt reasonably sure that the bear would eventually come back to the stream. The weather was quite warm, and a big bear will not run far without water.

An hour passed and I failed to hear anything of the pack, so rode a mile or two up the cañon. Still no sign of dogs or bear.

Finally I found a break in the cañon wall, and climbed out. Away to the north I heard Sam shout, and I answered him on my hunting horn. As I rode in the direction whence had come the shout, I was surprised to see a band of fifteen or twenty wild horses go crashing by at a distance of a hundred yards or less. I was sure they saw me, but so great seemed to be their terror that they did not so much as swerve from their course. Something had thrown a scare into those ponies that they wouldn't soon forget! I watched them out of sight, and then loped on up the mesa to join Sam. I met him shortly, together with old Jess and the dogs. There was a puzzled look on Sam's face, and old Jess was talking.

"It's bound to be a bear, I tell you," he was saying; "but I never seen a bear pull a stunt like that before!"

"Where's the bear?" I asked, as I rode up. Sam laughed.

"There sure is a mix-up here. Everybody's bumfuzzled, includin' the dogs. Come here an' I'll show you somethin'." He took me into a little manzanita thicket, and pointed to the carcass of a colt, freshly killed, and lying headless in a small clearing. The colt's head lay perhaps twenty feet away. I dismounted and made a short examination of the carcass. There seemed to be no mark of any sort on it, and the

head had been torn off clean. When I came to examine it, I found that the ears had been eaten!

"What did this?" I asked involuntarily.

"Me'n you don't know," grinned Sam; "an' old Jess don't know! He swears a bear done it, but he's just guessin'. The dogs trailed straight to this colt, and then made a loss. They couldn't carry the trail away from here at all—an' they're all here. I seen a bunch o' broomies back yonder that was mightily scared for some reason or other—this colt must've been caught out o' that bunch."

I nodded.

"I saw the horses, and they certainly were scared—but I wonder why the dogs can't work out the track."

At this juncture old Jess walked up, leading his saddle mule.

"Boys," he announced, "some varmint has shore treated this here colt rough. It looks like a bear's work to me. There's more bear tracks on this mesa than John saw—everywhere you look—an' yet the dogs can't seem to smell none of 'em. Either we got a sorry bunch o' dogs, or else the bear that done this killin' has took wings an' flew off. I know old Fiddle was on a hot track when he started down in the cañon, an' when the bear stopped to kill this colt, the track was bound to get hotter. That's plain ordinary reasonin'."

"Where is Fiddle?" I asked. "Let's bring him back here to the carcass and try to work the track out." Jess tooted his horn. The dogs clustered around us with eager whines. There was old Bess, white Florence, Big Pup, Drive, Bugle, both of the Airedales, and three young hounds that were possessed of a desire to eat the colt at once.

Jess scratched his head.

"Fiddle aint here," he grunted. "But he was dead shore here a while ago! I'll bet the ol' son-of-a-gun has got that track straight an' gone with it while we been sittin' around here arguin' like a bunch o' squaws. Let's scatter out an' hunt him. More'n likely he's pinchin' that old bear's heels right now an' wonderin' why his folks don't come along an' do somethin' about it."

WE mounted our horses and rode in the most likely directions. Each of us had a different notion as to where Fiddle had gone—and acted accordingly. I had the idea that the old hound was not far away. Sam had no particular idea at all, and Jess, sure of the fact that the dog was after a bear, was convinced that Fiddle was probably several miles away. We separated, Jess riding to the north, and Sam going out onto a point of rock that overlooked the main cañon. I could see him silhouetted against the sky, as I walked my horse along the rim.

SUDDENLY there came a rifle-shot from the north. I saw Sam whirl his horse and go galloping toward the sound. I listened for a moment, and there came another shot. This was too much for me, and I put the spurs to Buck.

As I rode, I guessed at the cause of the shooting. Jess had either run into a bunch of wild turkeys or he had seen a bear across the cañon. Certainly he could not have located Fiddle, for the old hound had a deep, mellow voice that carried well, and I should surely have heard the dog before I heard the shots.

I rode hard and shortly arrived at a spot which I guessed to be close to the scene of the shooting. Here I halted and listened. Directly before me was the rim of a very sheer and rocky side-cañon. The country on either side was clear, and I could see for quite a distance. And still there was no sign of Sam or Jess—nor of the dogs. I shouted at the top of my lungs, but without answer. Finally I got off my horse, walked over to the overhanging rimrock, and looked down. No sooner had I stuck my head over the rim than I heard Sam talking! He and Jess were not fifty yards below me—under the overhanging bluffs.

I called to them and Sam answered: "Come on down. Here's somethin' that'll surprise you!"

I finally managed to scramble down through the rocks, dragging Buck after me. The dogs were gathered around the carcass of a very large lion. Sam was sitting on a boulder, looking very much pleased with himself, and Jess was whetting his knife on his chaps. Near by grazed Sam's horse, Warrior, and Jess' saddle mule.

It seemed that Jess had ridden to the rim above and had stopped to look and listen for Fiddle. Failing to locate the old dog, he had dismounted and walked to the edge of the cliff—as I had done—and had looked over. No sooner had he stuck his head over, than he heard Fiddle directly below, barking treed. The dog was look-

ing up into a tall piñon, the top of which was almost level with the cañon rim.

Jess saw the lion at once, and shot twice at him, missing clean with both shots. At the second shot, the lion jumped out of the tree and leaped up through the rocks to the mesa. The dogs that were with Jess instantly saw the lion, and took after it in full cry.

Sam had heard the shooting, of course, and had ridden toward the spot on a dead run. Consequently he met the lion point-blank.

The lion dared not turn, for the dogs were right on his heels, so he sprang into a dead cedar, where he crouched, growling and spitting at the dogs below. Sam had already jerked his rifle from the scabbard, and without dismounting took a snap-shot at the big yellow cat. It was a lucky shot —piercing the tip of the lion's heart.

At the report of the gun, the lion clawed vainly for a hold and slipped from the tree, falling slam-bang into the jaws of the hounds. Every dog in the pack grabbed a leg, a foot, or a mouthful of fur, and the whole outfit rolled over the rim and fell ten or twelve feet through the rocks. Fiddle had seized the big cat's right forefoot, and still had hold of it when Sam managed to reach the scene of action. But the lion had had enough life left in him to bite Fiddle through the head, barely missing the brain, and to claw an ear loose on poor old Drive. Bugle had sprained a leg in the fall, and white Florence had a long gash in her side, the result of a last convulsive kick of the lion's hind paw.

JESS and I got to work with our knives, and when I had skinned out a hind-quarter, I tossed each dog a fresh chunk of warm lion meat. This they gobbled up eagerly, and Jess nodded his approval.

"There aint nothin' like givin' dogs a good feed o' right fresh lion meat to make lion-dogs out of 'em. A hound hunts for fun, but if he figgers there's goin' to be some eats in the bargain, he'll hunt just that much harder."

When we had finished the skinning job, Jess wiped his knife on a tuft of grass and drawled: "He shore was a tough old scoundrel. I'm hot an' thirsty, which reminds me I got a canteen on my saddle."

"Get it," I answered, "and I'll help you drink."

An idea had come to my mind, and I hurriedly slit open the lion's stomach. When Jess returned with the canteen, I held up two objects for him to look at.

"Those ears, by gosh!" he exclaimed; "an' just like they come off the colt—not even chawed up!"

"Thought you said a bear had eat them ears!" chuckled Sam.

"I did," replied Jess, heatedly. "But a feller can be wrong, can't he? I'd 'a' swore a bear done it, an' I was huntin' varmints in these mountains before you—an' Florida—was discovered. But it just goes to show that there's exceptions to everything—a fact I should have learned when my little sister's pet pony got on the prod an' kicked half o' my teeth out, forty years ago!"

Wherein a fire-engine salesman does business in Missouri and is asked to show 'em.

The Fire Fighter

By
R. Lambert Lease

A FEW years ago while I was demonstrating fire engines and fire pumps for a fighting-equipment company, I had many humorous experiences and met many queer characters; but the climax of them all was at Cornville, Missouri.

I had received orders from headquarters to stop at Cornville and demonstrate one of the old style man-power fire-pumps. It was mounted on a wagon with a brass bar on each side of the tank with cross-bars attached to the pump. A reel of hose was attached to the rear which connected the pump to a hydrant; another hose was connected to the front of the pump. This would throw quite a stream when sufficient man-power was applied to the pump-handles.

The salesman had been in Cornville and interviewed the city officials and made complete arrangements for the sale, except demonstrating the excellent working qualities of this wonderful fire fighter and getting the order. This simple matter was left for me.

Following in the wake of this high-powered salesman, I thus found Cornville the next stop on my list. So the next morning at seven-thirty A. M. I arrived in Cornville at the little yellow depot which represented the exclusive headquarters of the passenger station, freight warehouse, express office, and telegraph office.

I presented my card to the agent and asked if he had received a fire pump and if he could tell me where I could find some of the city officials. He informed me that he had received the pump, and pointing to a man a few feet away said: "There's Jim Durkin, the city marshal."

MARSHAL DURKIN, having heard our conversation, came strutting down the cinder walk, balancing himself on a heavy oak cane, for he was about sixty years old and somewhat unsteady. He wore a slouchy felt hat. His brown coat had holes in the elbows, and his blue trousers were about two sizes too large. His chin whiskers and the front of his blue shirt were smeared with tobacco juice.

I had failed to recognize Mr. Durkin as an officer but handed him my card and apologized for my stupidness.

There was nothing in the appearance of

Durkin to indicate that he was endowed with an excess amount of either intuition, observation or wisdom; yet in his own estimation all these attributes seemed to be his.

He informed me that for the third time he had been appointed Marshal of Cornville, a village of almost six hundred inhabitants, that he was personally acquainted with every resident of the town and every farmer within a radius of seven miles. He took great pride in referring to himself as an officer of the law and made it clear that I as well as the general public must respect him as such.

I asked him how he liked the looks of the new fire-wagon and he replied:

"Wa-ll, hit 'pears nice, but I'd ruther see hit workin'."

I explained that that was my business, and that as soon as the city officials could get together I expected to give a demonstration.

Durkin advised me that the mayor, city clerk and one of the trustees composed the committee appointed to purchase a fire-fighting apparatus. He advised me further that they were all business-men and that I would find them downtown, but if I would wait in front of the barber-shop until he finished his work, he would get them together.

I strolled down main street to the barber-shop and sat on a bench waiting for Durkin. He soon made his rounds, and assuring himself that the town was in no immediate danger, joined me at the barber shop.

The mayor was proprietor of a general merchandise store, and having been advised by Mr. Durkin of my presence, soon came wabbling down the street to join us at the barber-shop. His flabby cheeks sagged over his number seventeen collar; his extra long belt was strained to the limit in holding the oversized portion which it encircled in place. The boards in the walk squeaked and groaned in protest under the great burden of his enormous weight.

Harry Hosford, city clerk and cashier of the local bank, was next to appear. Hosford was little more than a shadow. His extremely small legs, very slender arms, long bony hands and sharp cheekbones all seemed to unite in giving him the appearance of an exceedingly frail individual.

Freddy Wiggins, trustee and insurance dealer, soon arrived. Wiggins would have been a man of full size many years ago if a negligent providence had not forgotten to have him grow in accordance with the usual scheme of nature as the years of youth passed by; but be that as it may Freddy appeared to be a mere child in comparison to the average man.

This composed the entire committee. Marshal Durkin was not officially a member of the committee, but he insisted that he would have to care for the pump, and that it was his duty to see that a town of such importance as Cornville got the best.

THE Marshal opened the subject by saying cautiously: "We haint bought that fire machine yet."

I replied: "That's understood; the fire pump has been shipped here in order that you may see what it will do; then the city officials may decide whether it is a good investment or not."

Mayor Abelson said he would like to see it in action, so I lost no time rounding up half a dozen volunteers to pull the outfit from the depot. This required little effort on my part as a crowd of young men and boys had congregated around our assembly and were eager to assist. They pulled the pump up the unpaved street from the depot to Mayor Abelson's store as though it were a plaything.

I connected the hose to a hydrant which was a part of the new waterworks recently installed, unrolled the hose containing the nozzle, turned on the water at the hydrant, and bade the men to try their muscles at the pump.

Everything worked fine, and with about ten of those strong "hill billies" at the pump, I soon had a stream of water shooting forty to fifty feet high.

Abelson and Wiggins gave an expression of satisfaction, but Hosford said: "It does the work very well, but you want too dad gum much money."

Marshal Durkin watched the demonstration with keen interest but said nothing until the pump was stopped; then he said: "I'm hardly satisfied; 'pears to me a fire would have right smart of a start 'fore that thing could be put going."

I tried to convince him that this outfit could be put in action in a very short time, but he was a typical Missourian and insisted that he would have to be shown.

Some one suggested that we set a house on fire so it would have a real trial. I

told them that it was not customary to do such things, but that I had no doubt but what the fire would be extinguished before it got a good start.

Some one yelled: "Let's set fire to the old Dugan house! It would be a good thing if it did burn down."

Mr. Hosford objected, arguing that there was no use taking a chance of destroying valuable property merely for an experiment. Mayor Abelson agreed with him; but without stopping to reason, many of the spectators had decided to carry out the idea. One young man whom they called "Red" secured a box of shavings from a carpenter shop, and informed the crowd that he and two other men would put the box in the house, touch a match to it and yell, "Fire!" Then we could bring the fire wagon and put it out.

I did not approve of this experiment but did not think it good diplomacy to object, as I was confident that we could extinguish the fire before it had gained much headway and if so, it would be easy to close the deal.

I wound the hoses on the reels and had everything ready when the cry came: "Fire! Fire!"

BEFORE I had time to realize what was taking place, about a dozen of the village rough-necks had hold of the pulling ropes and were racing down the street at full speed. The wagon clattered like a lumber-truck as it bounced over the rough streets. I ran as fast as I could, but couldn't keep up. I was about half a block behind when they attempted to turn a corner about a block from the fire. It was a rough corner, and they did not reduce speed at all. The front wheel struck a bump, and the wagon rolled over with a jingling crash.

The whole town soon began to gather around the burning building. The black smoke ascended to the sky as the flames gradually spread in the frame structure.

Durkin arrived at the scene in a short time and attempted to maintain order, but he was more in the way than anyone else.

The men were so excited that I could hardly get anyone to follow instructions but finally managed to get the wagon right side up and on to the fire. But the three-room frame building known as the Dugan house was doomed. It was in a mass of flames by the time we got the hose connected and the pump going.

Women living in the houses near by screamed and ran about hysterically. I realized it was too late to save the building, so turned the stream on the house to the north as the wind was whipping the flames in that direction. This required considerable effort, but did not last long, as the Dugan house was consumed by the roaring flames in a very short time.

After the excitement was over I found Mayor Abelson and Mr. Hosford in conference trying to place the blame on some one for burning the building.

My hopes of making a sale were almost at zero for a few seconds, but Marshal Durkin joined us, and to my surprise expressed his approval of the city's purchasing the fire-pump. He was of the opinion that it was well-built or it would not have endured such hardship!

The committee agreed with Durkin. I lost no time in getting their signatures on the dotted line, and was soon on my way rejoicing.

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