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MARCH 1928

THE Illustrated BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

N.S.E.

Tarzan Lord of the Jungle

The Narcotic Squad's Fight with the Dope-Ring

COMPLETE NOVELETTE **by Lemuel De Bra**

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Wm. Shore, Neenach, Cal., a former cow-puncher, reports earning $525 in a single week as a salesman. He earned $3,000 in 5 months just after completing N. S. T. A. training.

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As a pattern-maker, the income of Kingsley Rowland, Audubon, N. J., was limited to $1,500 a year. Now he writes that it is about $4,000, thanks to N. S. T. A.

Last Year's Pay Looks Like Small Change To These Men Today!

$4,800 More

E. B. Englehardt, Chattanooga, Tenn., writes that he raised his pay $4,800 after reading "Modern Salesmanship." He credits N. S. T. A. with a great deal of his success.

Here Are Six Men Who Were Formerly Caught in the Hopeless Treadmill of Low-Pay Jobs. Today Every One of Them Reports Earning from $4,000 up to $10,000 a Year! Right Now—the Same Opportunity That Changed Their Lives So Completely Is Open to YOU! Don't Fail to Read Every Word of This Vital Message!

WHEN a man who has been struggling along in a low-pay job suddenly steps out and starts earning real money—$5,000, $7,500, or $10,000 a year, he usually gives his friends quite a shock. It is hard for them to believe that he is the same man they used to know. Take one of the men whose pictures appear on this page—Kingsley Rowland of New Jersey, for example. His pals in the shop where he was working as a pattern-maker laughed at his ambitions to make more money. But he knew what he wanted, and he set about getting it in the shortest possible way. A remarkable free book, "Modern Salesmanship," opened his eyes to the opportunities in the selling profession. This book proved that Master Salesmen are *made*, not "born." It told facts and secrets about money-making that were a positive revelation. And best of all, it outlined a simple plan that enables men from all walks of life to quickly reach the top without spending years on the road—without losing a day or a dollar from their present positions!

A Few Weeks—Then Bigger Pay

Rowland seized the opportunity to qualify as a Master Salesman, and has richly profited by it. He now reports an increase of $2,500 in his pay, and his future possibilities are unlimited. Some of his former friends perhaps say he was "lucky." He was. But his "luck" lay in his decision to cast his lot with the N. S. T. A. Thousands of other men have been similarly "lucky." Some report increases ranging up to 900%! They have forgotten the days when they were caught in the rut—but they never forget that they owe a great part of their success to N. S. T. A. training.

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You may have doubts in your own mind about how salesmanship can help you to solve your own problem. If so, we cannot urge you too strongly to read the same fascinating message that inspired Rowland, Shore, Englehardt, and the thousands of others who took this remarkable short cut to success. If we were asking two or three dollars a copy for "Modern Salesmanship," you might hesitate. But it is now FREE! See for yourself what salesmanship has done for others—and what the National Salesmen's Training Association stands ready to do for you. No matter what your present thoughts on selling are, "Modern Salesmanship" will give you a new insight into this fascinating and highly-paid profession. Mail the coupon for your Free copy NOW!

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THE BLUE BOOK

EDWIN BALMER, Editor
DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

Cover Design: Painted by Laurence Herndon to illustrate "The Trail of Rapture."
Frontispiece: "Men Who Won the West—The Pony Express Riders." Drawn by Frank Hoban.

Two Important Serials

Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle By Edgar Rice Burroughs 40

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The Tough Nut By Harold Titus 96

Stirring events in a North Woods lumber town wrought into a deeply interesting novel by the distinguished author of "Spindrift," "The Beloved Pawn" and "Timber." (Illustrated by William Molt.)

Short Stories You Will Remember

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The cowboy writer who gave us "Vanishing Herds" and "The Right Cross-counter" here offers a specially exciting tale of the wilder West. (Illustrated by Paul Lehman.)

The Trail of Rapture By Frank Shaw 21

A one-time bucko mate who has won wealth and "swallowed the anchor" again heeds the call of the sea and encounters a tremendous adventure. (Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson.)

Picture Stuff By Raoul F. Whitfield 33

A writing man who has himself been an airplane pilot contributes this breath-taking tale of the stunt flyers. (Illustrated by William Molt.)

The White Elephant By Bud La Mar 64

Our bronco-buster fiction-writer is at his best in this quaint story of two rodeo riders, a gaudy prize saddle—and no money a-tall. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

Undercurrents By Culpeper Zandtt 73

An American physician in the Orient employs his gift for playing "god from the machine" to good advantage. (Illustrated by Joseph Sabo.)

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MAGAZINE

MARCH, 1928

Special Notice to Writers and Artists: Manuscripts and art material submitted for publication in The Blue Book Magazine will only be received on the understanding that the publisher and editors shall not be responsible for loss or injury thereto while such manuscripts or art material are in the publisher's possession or in transit.

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The story of a hold-up that wasn't so funny at the time.

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE is issued on the first of the month preceding its date (March issue out February 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.

"He is a genius," men said

No judgment could have been more unfair

AS the first Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton achieved a brilliant record. Matchless in debate, clear visioned and broad-minded, he re-established the financial honor and good name of his country in the chaotic days following the Revolution.

So great was Alexander Hamilton's ability that many men called him a genius. Speaking of this false impression he said: "All the genius I have lies in this. When I have a subject in hand, I study it profoundly. Day and night it is before me. I explore it in all its bearings. My mind becomes pervaded with it. Then the effort which I have made is what people are pleased to call the fruit of genius. It is the fruit of labor and thought."

Today we glibly place the stamp of genius on our business leaders. "This one," we say, "is an organization genius. That one a production wizard. That other a born salesman, a genius."

We call Carnegie a genius. But we forget the long and tireless hours in the mills, his prodigious industry, his unflagging application.

We call Schwab a genius. But we forget the endless experiments in chemistry, the problems in engineering, and the unfailing study of men and methods.

Business success today does not come to the genius. It comes to the man well grounded in business fundamentals, to the man who sees clearly the close relation between all departments of business. It comes to the man whose knowledge of business gives him a vision and initiative far beyond that of other men. Such a man *must* stand out from the crowd.

How do these men obtain this clarity of vision, this unswerving initiative which marks them as leaders? Many of them build slowly, painfully, accumulating knowledge thru long years of personal experience. At 50 or 60 they at last achieve success. They still have perhaps ten or fifteen years of larger reward ahead.

Others achieve the same results, but by a surer, quicker and less expensive route.

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Nineteen years ago Joseph French Johnson, late Dean of the School of Commerce, Accounts and Finance of New York University, assembled into one Course the accumulated experience of the country's most successful business men. He saw the necessity of a carefully directed course of study for men who would shorten the road to success. Most appropriately the Institute, of which he was the first president, bears the name of Alexander Hamilton who knew so well the value of systematic study.

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Only a training which is authoritative and practical could have the endorsement of these men who constitute the Advisory Council of the Alexander Hamilton Institute:

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This Course is for men who are already successful but who realize that they have blind spots in their business equipment. If you are such a man, we will gladly send you the interesting booklet, "Forging Ahead in Business." It describes the Course and Service in detail. Simply mail the coupon.

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 46 MARCH 1928 No. 5

Men in Jeopardy

"IN our line of work," responded a noted scientist-explorer to a man who inquired concerning his adventures in the Gobi Desert, "we regard adventures as a confession of incompetence." The scientist was right, of course—from his point of view: he was out to find evidences of prehistoric life and other scientific data; the less trouble he got into, the better he could do his job.

There's another side to the matter, however: a man's behavior under stress of physical or moral hazard has throughout the ages been the measure of his mettle, the balance wherein his soul is weighed. No more revealing light can be shed on a man's character than the record of his conduct in time of peril; and so both in history and fiction the most engrossing episodes are the chronicles of warfare, of the more venturesome sports, and of battle against the savagery of Nature at sea, in jungle, in the desert or in the Arctic.

With this in mind it is specially interesting to consider the stories which follow: Harold Titus' fine novel, "The Tough Nut," for instance, wherein a young woodsman takes on a splendid fight against heavy odds for the simple reason that he wants a tough nut to crack: his valiant spirit, in other words, longs to test itself in a difficult venture.

Likewise in Jay Lucas' thrill-filled ranch-life story: continual risk, continual battle, is the very essence of the lure this picturesque story affords. Raoul Whitfield's "Picture Stuff," that vivid tale of breath-taking exploits in the air, is another example — as is Frank Shaw's swift-moving shipboard drama, "The Trail of Rapture."

So too H. Bedford-Jones' "A Plunge in the Seine," Bud La Mar's "The White Elephant," Lemuel De Bra's "Crystals of Crime," indeed all the other picturesque and lively tales that keep them company, are notable in that they reveal men in jeopardy—men at the most interesting moments of their lives.

Next month you will find unique entertainment in stories of this same quintessential quality. William Byron Mowery's stirring novelette of the North Woods, "The Sergeant of Lone Cree," describes an even more engrossing adventure than his famous "Roaring Bill" or "The Loon Lake Patrol." Clarence Herbert New's Free Lance story, H. Bedford-Jones' new tale of detective work during the Legion Convention in Paris, Culpeper Zandtt's "The Bad Man of Boroema," Warren H. Miller's vivid Saharan drama "The Lost Regiment," and many other actionful short stories will reveal to you men fighting through crises in picturesque places.

Moreover, our two fascinating serials, "Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle" and "The Tough Nut," come to specially absorbing episodes; and your fellow-readers will again describe the moments of high adventure in which they found themselves.

—*The Editors.*

Drawn by Frank Hoban

MEN WHO WON THE WEST

The Pony Express Riders

IN April of 1860 was inaugurated the longest and most hazardous relay race ever run—the Pony Express, whereby horsemen carried the mail some two thousand miles from the rail-end at St. Joseph, Missouri, to San Francisco in the then astonishing time of eight days. Eighty riders—daring young frontiersmen of light weight—were employed; and each, changing mounts at one of the hundred and ninety stations maintained, rode three horses at top speed in covering his route of some thirty-odd miles.

Letters were limited to one-half ounce in weight, but even though five dollars each was the fee charged, the Express lost money. It did not, however, lose the mail: out of a total of six hundred and fifty thousand miles traveled by the pony express riders, through wild and almost trackless country, in continual peril from storms, outlaws and Indians, only once was the mail lost—though in two instances men rode nearly three hundred miles without rest; and on one occasion it was a riderless horse that brought the mail in.

The End of the BAR-BOX-D

This tremendously exciting story of cowboy warfare is by a writer who was for years himself a cow-puncher—the author of "Vanishing Herds," "The Right Cross-counter" and "The Lion-hound's Story."

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

By

JAY LUCAS

SAMMY HOPKINS seated himself slowly on the edge of the veranda of the Circle T. He drew his stiff leg to a comfortable position on the floor, allowing the other to dangle, the high boot-heel raking the ground, the big silver-mounted spur tinkling monotonously. Slowly, broodingly, he rolled and lit a brown cigarette. But the cigarette went out, even while he sat staring silently at it with a look of worry on his many-wrinkled, weather-beaten little face. He removed his big hat and laid it beside him, and his gray head bent lower and lower as though in fear. But when he at last raised his head to stare unseeingly out over the miles of range he controlled, out across the cañons and mountains, it was not fear that showed in the gentle blue eyes that peered from their thousand wrinkles. Worry there was, to be sure, and regret—a deep regret, but fear was unknown to the soul of the little crippled cow-man. He turned to the powerful young man beside him:

"You're right, Ben." Again the gray old head shook sadly. "It has to come. Lord knows I did all I could to get along with 'em—so did you, son, so did you, though I know how hard it must have been on anyone with a temper like yours."

Ben Jurney twitched his bulky shoulders, as though wishing to throw off the load of the responsibility that was to come. He removed his gun-belt, and dejectedly threw it on the floor. Then he jerked his close-fitting trousers farther up on his lean hips, and eased his six-foot-two of bone and muscle into a squeaky rocker. He crossed his knees, rolled and lit a cigarette, and stared absently over the head of the little man before he spoke:

"We've had horse-thieves an' rustlers—jest one danged thing after another; but we got the best of them all. Then you make me take a half-interest in the outfit, jest because I did what you was payin' me to do—the biggest outfit in Arizona—an'—"

"Son, if I hadn't got you for range-boss when I did, there'd have been no outfit. I'm too old to fight the sort of men we've had to deal with. You earned your half-interest, an' more too."

"Well, we got the best of all of 'em—cleaned 'em out. I get married, an' we settle down to get fat. An' then—" He lapsed into silence.

"Who'd have thought the Bar Box D would have spread out that way!" he grunted, after a moment's silence. "Why, when I came here, there was a dozen outfits between us an' them. Where are they now?"

"Gone!" sighed Sammy. "Most jest drove out o' business. Some bought for a song, because the owners thought they'd better take what they could get than get shot. I never thought they'd have the nerve to try to drive us out. . . . . Who's comin'?" he broke off.

BOTH watched the horseman dashing up the draw, the dust billowing up behind him.

"It's Jack! More dirty work!"

They were so intent on watching the approaching horseman that they did not see Jane, Ben's wife, until she drew her horse up before them. She dismounted slowly, her face set and very white. She quietly drew off her gloves and removed her gun before she turned to them. Her slender figure was quivering with rage, and her eyes were flashing:

"The horse-pasture fence has been cut just over the hill, and the saddle-horses are scattered all over the range."

For a moment Ben was speechless with rage. Then he sprang to his feet:

"That means fight! Damned if I take another thing off the Bar Box D!"

"Heck, son!" murmured little Sammy. "I know how you feel, but I'm older an' cooler-headed. Do you know what war with that big outfit means—our boys lyin' dead an' cold out on the range? When we fight, we fight, Ben!"

"I'll take no more! Fight we have to!"

"Ben, son, I'll jest take a ride over to the Bar Box D an' talk matters over with 'em. When I show 'em what a war between us will mean, they'll stay on their own range. What do you think, Jane?"

"Why—" she hesitated, "you might try it just once. I'm afraid it'll have to be fight, but we'll do what we can first to keep out of it."

They turned as Jack threw his sweating, laboring horse to its haunches before them, the usual happy-go-lucky grin gone from his young face. Then he spoke, very quietly: "Smilin' Slim is dead."

"Dead!"

"He's lyin' over in Turtle Basin with a bullet in his back, an' his horse shot dead beside him. His gun is in the holster, an' had never been fired. I sent Pete for the sheriff."

There was a long, long period of white-faced silence. At last Ben slowly reached for his gun-belt, and slowly, very slowly, buckled it on. Then he turned to the others, his face an ashy gray, his eyes flaming like black coals. There was a hollow, metallic ring to his voice as he said quietly: "This means—*fight.*"

"Yes, it means fight." There was a dull flush on little Sammy's face.

Jane's face was pale, and her hands trembled, but her voice was steady:

"Yes, it means fight or let the Circle T be trampled on. No one can trample on the Circle T."

"An' the boys?" Ben turned to Jack.

"The boys? I'll speak for 'em. They're ready to fight while there's a man of 'em left. We wont forget Smilin' Slim!"

"Then,"—Ben braced his shoulders and stared out over the hills as though seeing the war that was to come,—"it's fight while there's a man left. *The Bar Box D must be wiped off the earth.*"

THE evening sun was sinking low as the silent little cavalcade rode slowly into Turtle Basin. The sheriff, in the lead, drew his horse to a stop, and the others reined alongside by the silent figure on the ground. Smiling Slim lay on his face, his arms outstretched, a hardened blotch between his shoulder-blades showing where the bullet had entered. The sheriff gently turned him over, showing the pallid face, smiling, even in death. Death had come to him so swiftly and unexpectedly that his expression had not changed.

"Pore old partner! Dead!"

The sheriff heard the breathed words, and looked up slowly, to see Ben Jurney standing white-faced, hat in hand, looking down on the boy who so often had ridden the range by his side, who, by his side, had shared many a danger. There was sorrow, and horror, and consternation, on Ben's face. It seemed as though he could not realize that never again was Smiling Slim to stand night guard with him through the storm, to help him shoe a dangerous mustang, to tear laughing with him down the streets. . . . .

"Yes, Ben, he's dead," murmured the sheriff, "an' killin' him was the blackest deed that ever was done in this county. But—" his voice grated harshly—"some one's goin' to pay for it!"

"Yes." Ben raised his white, set face. "Some one's goin' to pay for it!" His eyes glinted like points of steel, and his lips drew to a thin, hard line.

"Say!" The sheriff stepped forward with quiet eagerness. "I haven't a man to spare now that could handle this case right; how about lettin' me make you deputy sheriff for a while, Ben?"

"It makes no difference—I'd do all I could, law or no law," Ben answered.

"Then I'll deputize you—that is," he hastened, "if Sammy don't mind."

"I don't mind. He's a good man for

"Smilin' Slim is lyin' over in Turtle Basin with a bullet in his back. I sent Pete for the sheriff!"

the job; he'll never quit till he gets whoever done it."

"That's why I want to deputize him. Remember you're actin' for the law, Ben, an' should try to get whoever it was alive. But," he added softly, "in case you can't get him alive, there'll be no one in this county to ask many personal questions."

SLIM'S body was lifted upon the cantle of Jack's saddle.

"Where—where do we put him?" asked Jack, chokily.

"In his own bunk in the bunk-house, for the last night." There was grieved surprise in Ben's gentle answer. Where else should Smiling Slim sleep?

Three of the men remained behind, sitting their horses with bowed heads, while back toward the Circle T rode the little band. At last Ben Jurney turned slowly to the sheriff and Sammy:

"Do you think there's anything to what the preachers say—about heaven an' hell, an' all those things? Because if there is a Big Trail Boss, a partner like Smilin' Slim was would be the first hand he'd take on! Slim was wild sometimes, but he was square with everyone, an'—"

Whoosh—thump—*crack!*

Ben's horse plunged sideways with a squeal as the bullet burned his thigh, almost unseating his rider.

"Jack!" cried Ben, "get Jane out of this!"

Jack nodded. With one hand steadying the body of Slim, he spurred his horse, and dashed down the trail with Jane at his side.

Whoosh—*crack!*

"Damn!" The sheriff dropped his rein and grasped his right shoulder.

"The wash!"

Ben was galloping back across the little flat with Sammy beside him. Another bullet struck close to Charkey, Ben's great black. With a snort, the animal took the bit in his teeth and tried to clear the broad wash in a leap. He was unused to jumping, but might have covered the distance, such was his terror, if Ben's strong hand on the rein had not thrown him off his balance. His fore-feet struck the level ground on the other side, but his hind shoes shot into the straight bank. For an instant he hung there, straining every muscle to drag himself up. Then the soft edge of the bank gave way, and he toppled backward, striking the bottom in a tangle of hoofs and leather. He hastily scrambled to his feet; Ben, covered with dust, was at his head, with a firm hand twisted in the cheek of the bridle.

"Whoa, boy! Whoa, Charkey!"

Sammy's horse was teetering down the almost vertical bank. He dropped to his knees at the bottom, with the old man still seated in the saddle. Both tugged quickly at their carbines, but before they had with-

drawn them from the scabbards, the sheriff, afoot, half jumped, half fell between them.

"They got my horse, but I stopped for my carbine—lucky thing the horse fell so it was on top!"

"Use it! Shoot!" Ben urged, adding: "We can't hit 'em—they're behind the wall of that Indian ruin. Shoot in the air toward where the boys went—they can't be gone far." He was hastily jamming fresh cartridges in his gun.

Volley after volley they fired, trying to shoot in unison, that the shots might be heard farther. Sometimes they fired a few shots toward the butte. At last the reply came, an answering volley, closer than they had expected.

"Yee-ee-ee-ee-ee!" A high-pitched yell from Ben.

"Yip—yip—yee!"

JACK'S answering yell was flung down to them as the returning cowboys topped the ridge. Then down into the flat they came, riding madly.

"I'll go meet them. This wash can't hold all of us, an' we'd do no good here anyway."

Ben was hastily straightening his saddle. He glanced up the short wash, seeking the easiest place of ascent, for the moment he swung into the saddle he would be a target for the men on the butte.

"Lend me your horse, Sammy." The sheriff was hastening forward, one arm dangling limply.

"Well!" Sammy threw him a hasty glare. "An' you shot!"

The sheriff tried to grasp Sammy's rein, but the old man was dashing up the wash after Ben. They plunged up a break in the bank one after the other, and swung together toward the oncoming cowboys.

"Take half of 'em," Ben jerked out hastily. "Run for the cedars, an' scatter out like we're goin' to surround the butte. Don't stop—they'll run. We'll strike their trail at the back o' the butte."

The men swung apart, and the oncoming cowboys guessed their plan even before they heard their shouts, for they quickly divided, half going to Ben, the rest to Sammy. Then across the flat they raced, away from each other. The light was growing poor for accurate shooting, and the scattered, zig-zagging men were a difficult target, but one of Ben's men lurched and toppled from his saddle with a hollow moan. His horse raced on with the empty saddle, snorting in fear, for he had smelled human blood.

Mormon Jake's horse staggered and fell, his rider sprawling in the dust, his six-shooter flying from his hand. Ben caught the riderless horse as it tried to dash past him, and paused while Mormon Jake ran to him and sprang into the saddle. This wild-looking Mormon with the savage temper would be invaluable in a fight, and was as loyal to his outfit and his friends as any other cowboy on the outfit.

In another moment they had reached the safety of the dense cedars. A glance back had shown that Sammy's men, too, had reached cover. One of their horses lay near the trees, but his rider was running, apparently unhurt, to safety, although the bullets were kicking up dust all around him. With a wild leap that would have seemed funny under other circumstances, he sheltered himself behind the trunk of a great cedar.

"What did you do with Slim?" asked Ben as they dashed through the cedars.

"Why—why—" hesitated Jack, "when we heard the shootin', your wife—Jane—she made me give him to her, so that we boys could all go back."

Ben did not answer, but his face went still whiter, and became still more set, as he sank the spurs in his horse and dashed forward faster than before, his men crashing after him.

They had made almost a complete half-circle of the butte before they struck the trail. It was now almost dark, but the flying hoofs of the Bar Box D men had torn the soft ground and cedar humus in an unmistakable manner. Ben raised a yell, in which his men joined him. As they dashed along the trail, they were joined by Sammy's men, who had been riding farther out from the butte. Sometimes they could hear a faint crashing ahead of them.

"They're well mounted!" grunted Ben, as he glanced down from his flying horse at the tracks.

Well mounted indeed the fugitives seemed to be, for the Circle T men seemed to gain little or none, fast though they rode.

"Ben," grunted Sammy Hopkins, "it's no use. It's about dark, an' they can give us the dodge any time they want to now. Let 'em go till after the burying tomorrow."

Reluctantly the men drew their horses

to a standstill, for they saw the truth of Sammy's words.

"I hate to let 'em go this way," murmured one of the men who had followed Sammy. "Who else was it they got? I saw one o' your men fall."

"Jim, that new man," answered Ben, "I gave the signal to Dave to go back an' look after him as soon as the gang left the butte."

"I thought," grunted Mormon Jake, "that it was poor ol' Dave himself, but I was scared to ask. I'd missed him as we rode along."

Jack turned to Ben:

"What do we do tomorrow?"

There was a moment of grim silence, and Ben spoke quietly:

"We go straight to the Bar Box D as soon as the buryin' is over, an' we waste no time when we get there. There'll be no Bar Box D tomorrow night, or else there'll be no Circle T."

"We'll have to—"

MORMON JAKE broke off suddenly at a motion from Sammy. It was quite dark now, and the men stared into the cedars ahead of them. Soon they heard the sound again, a low moan. They crowded forward, and soon were off their horses, around the figure on the ground. Sammy struck a match over that figure, but on second thought stuck it into a large tuft of bear-grass which blazed up brightly.

"It's that half-breed Mexican of the Bar Box D!" grunted some one.

Another threw an armful of dry brush on the blaze, and all bent over the prostrate figure of Juan Nuñez. There was a patch of blood at one side of his abdomen, low down, and another near his left shoulder. Ben stooped close to hear his words.

"Red Billings," he gasped. "He— I get shot in stomach—couldn't ride. Red Billings not want me to talk. He shoot. He keel me. Red Billings—"

"Who shot Slim?" asked Ben quickly, bending low to catch the faint answer.

"Red Billings—he shoot Slim. He say he clean—up—Circle T—an'—"

The half-breed coughed faintly and closed his eyes. Again he opened them, and again he tried to speak, but a red foam came to his lips and he relaxed. Ben stood up slowly.

"Red Billings—the Bar Box D foreman. I thought so! Boys, remember that—Red Billings."

That was all he said, but his men well knew what he meant. "We'll remember," came the answer.

THE east was scarcely showing the first trace of gray next morning as the two cowboys were lowered into their last resting-places by the tender hands of those who had been their companions during life. Old Dave had asked that he be allowed to perform the ceremony according to the old custom of the range, the custom of an older, wilder day which was but legend to the younger men. Now he and Sammy stood bareheaded, holding the bridles of the dead cowboys' top horses close to the grave.

As the first earth rolled into the graves, the two old men stepped to the off side of the horses, slowly hooked the right stirrups over the saddle-horns, and drew their knives. Together, they cut the short latigoes, and pulled the saddles and blankets from the horses. Then they unbuckled the bridles at the cheeks, and drew them off, allowing the horses to wander out to the open range.

Some of the younger men had never even heard of this ceremony, but none could fail to be impressed by it, or to understand its meaning. The horses had been unsaddled on the wrong side, and the latigo cut instead of unbuckled, as a tribute to the horsemanship of the dead men—no one else could even unsaddle their horses properly, was what it meant. The unbuckling of the bridle-cheek had the same significance. Also, the cutting of the latigo had meant that the saddle would be needed no more; so also had meant the liberating of the horses to the open range—their riders were dead; no one else was horseman enough to presume to ride them.

The men rode slowly, clustered together, back toward the ranch. For some time there was silence; at last old Dave spoke:

"Boys, there'll be some more horses unsaddled on the off side before we're through with the Bar Box D."

"We're expectin' it."

It was a cool, matter-of-fact statement from Jack. The old man's eyes lighted.

"I'd been claimin'," he muttered, "that cowboys weren't what they used to be when I was a boy. That's where I was wrong, boys, an' I admit it. It's the same old sperrit—the same old sperrit. I'm proud to be ridin' with this outfit."

"Let's start to the Bar Box D an' not

Ben's horse plunged sideways as a bullet burned his thigh. "Jack!" cried Ben, "get

wait for Mormon to come back." Jack was impatient, as were most of the others.

"We'll wait a little while more," Ben shook his head. "He should get back soon, an' then we'll know how the Bar Box D is fixed to meet us. If he don't come soon, we'll jest ride— Here he comes now!"

Mormon Jake dashed over the low ridge and into them.

"I rode like hell," he grunted, "afraid you'd start before I came. There's no one at the ranch, in case you went there. The whole outfit is a-lyin' on the top o' Indian Hill jest over there, fixin' to bushwhack us as we go by. If they'd got you under them in the open flat, they'd have shot you down like they did Slim."

"I never thought o' that!" grunted Ben. "We was about ready to start. We can come on 'em from the back, where they wont be expectin' us—up Cedar Ridge."

"They'll have some one watchin' us—they'll know sure we're comin'!" warned Sammy.

"They had—Indian Tom." Mormon Jake's voice was grim. "But he aint watchin' no more."

"Good! Then let's go!"

Ben broke into a swift canter, his men following him. As they rode, they hastily discussed plans. Indian Hill overhung the little open valley to the west. To try to approach it from that side would be useless. On its north and south slopes also the country was open but for scattering cedars, not nearly enough to afford cover to the attackers. To the east, however, it was approached by a ridge covered with dense cedars to within a few hundred feet of the old Indian fortress which crowned it, where the Bar Box D men were lying in wait. There seemed to be but one feasible plan: a cautious advance under cover of the cedars, and then a quick rush across the open to the ruin itself. It was a desperate plan, but the men were no soldiers, and were in a desperate mood, despite their quietness.

"Let's take things easy, an' save our horses, boys."

Jane out of this!" Jack nodded and dashed down the trail with Jane at his side.

Ben drew his horse to a slow trot as he climbed the ridge, then to a walk. He glanced around him as he reached the summit. The first rays of the rising sun were just shooting over the eastern horizon, and Ben turned quickly to his men:

"Boys, let's wait a bit. The sun'll soon be up an' blazin' in their eyes when they shoot at us. That'll ruin their shootin'—no one can shoot against the sun."

Eager though the men were for the fight, there were murmurs of approval. All realized only too well the advantage the Bar Box D men would have, sheltered as they were by the stone walls of the ruin. They rode forward very slowly, for they depended entirely upon surprise. The others would be looking down into the flat, expecting every moment to see their victims ride into the open below them, where they would be helpless. They would not expect this assault from the back.

"Say," exclaimed Jack, "how would it be if I climbed that big cedar an' took a look at 'em while we're waitin'?"

"Fine!" answered Ben. "But be danged careful not to let 'em see you."

Jack slipped from his horse and quickly worked upward among the dense branches.

"I see some one's hat. . . . . He seems to be lookin' this way. Let's see—" Jack climbed a little higher, leaned out a little farther.

Suddenly the dead limb on which he was standing gave way and his feet shot down as a bullet burned his arm. Then as he fell to the ground, a rain of lead shot through the top of the cedar.

"Now, I've done it!" he groaned.

"Let's go!"

BEN was dashing forward, the others behind him. There was no longer any need for caution. The faces of the men were very grim as they crashed through the cedars. Well they knew what it would mean to dash from the trees and across the open saddle into the carbines of the men in the ruin. Still, not one hesitated.

They tore like a tornado down the in-

creasing slope, heedless of the dead snags that tore their clothes. Ben, who was still in the lead, heard a sound ahead of him, and leaned forward, listening as he rode. Then he knew what it was—another party of horsemen also dashing through the trees.

"Look out, boys—they're coming!" he yelled. "They wouldn't face us in the ruin."

Old Dave was almost abreast of Ben.

"Look out or they'll run, boys!" Dave cautioned. "They were scared to run downhill from us an' let us get 'em below us in the open—like they wanted to get us. They'll dodge through the cedars!"

Now the shooting began, as one party could catch occasional glimpses of the other through the cedars. Suddenly Ben heard a queer sound from old Dave, and turned to see his face a strange, ashy gray, while he rocked in his saddle. He tried to speak, but failed. Then the words came, slowly, jerkily:

"Boys—I'm done. Unsaddle my—my horse—off side—an'—"

He lurched and toppled forward from the saddle, and everyone knew the old man was dead before he struck the ground.

THE Bar Box D men were shooting furiously, but swinging to the left, trying to circle the others without leaving the cedars of the ridge. Ben's orders could not be heard in the din of yells and shots, but it mattered little—there was but one thing to do; bring the others to a standstill, or force them off the cedar ridge into the open country below. Sammy's horse stumbled and fell, but a backward look showed Ben that the old man and his horse were struggling to their feet, both apparently unhurt, but badly shaken. The Bar Box D men were riding madly just inside the edge of the trees, and the others were crashing toward them at an acute angle. Then the open side of the ridge loomed ahead, and Ben's voice raised above the din:

"Stop, boys! Don't ride into the open!"

His men were around the others in a half-circle, forcing them into a compact band bristling with six-shooters. Here and there a horse or man fell, but the Circle T men, scattered in the cedars as they were, had a great advantage over the little knot of desperadoes. Ben felt a bullet strike the cantle of his saddle. His gun cracked, and he could see a small man in a huge Mexican sombrero topple from his horse.

Again Ben raised his voice:

"Throw 'em up! It's the law! I'm a deputy, an' I called on those other men to help me."

His men had slipped from their horses, and were darting from cedar-trunk to cedar-trunk, shooting into the knot before them as they went. The Bar Box D men huddled still closer together on their terrified horses, which had been crazed by the smell of blood. They were afraid to dismount, and still more afraid to attempt a dash down the bare slope which would have left them an easy mark for the men above, most of whom had carbines. Again Ben called:

"The game's up, boys! Might as well throw 'em up!"

There was a lull in the firing on both sides, and then a voice came from the group:

"We give up!"

While some of the Circle T men covered the group from the shelter of the trees, others rushed in to disarm and tie them. But Ben was not in either group, for just as he heard the call of surrender, he had turned to Mormon Jake, who was near him:

"I can't see Red Billings. Can you?"

"Good Lord! That's it!"

Mormon was staring from the prisoners in the center to Ben, and back again.

"What's the matter?" asked Ben, uneasily.

"Matter! Hell! Let's go!"

Mormon was rushing back toward his horse, and Ben, in alarm, followed his example. As they sprang into their saddles, the Mormon swore fiercely:

"That damned little ol' fool—Sammy! I saw him turn back an' ride off a mile a minute. That's what it is—he saw Red sneakin' back an' took out after him alone! He yelled something to me, but I couldn't hear, there was so much racket."

PRESENTLY they swung their running horses sharply to the left, as they found the trail of three mounted men leading toward the south. The distance between the grouped hoof-prints showed that the horses were fast, and were being pushed to their top speed.

"Red Billings an' some one else—an' ol' Sammy after 'em alone!" gasped Mormon.

Another trail swung into that of the fleeing men.

"Another of 'em—behind Sammy!" gasped Mormon.

"No." Ben was leaning low over his horse's neck as he raced. "That last trail is Sammy's—I know the tracks of his big blood-bay. Three of 'em got away, an' that little crippled cuss is after 'em alone! Good *Lord!* I wish he'd use more jedgment!"

He had cause for uneasiness, for he well knew what a fire-eater his little crippled partner was, despite his gentle manner and appearance.

Red Billings and his men had skirted the south edge of the cedars for a short distance, and had then cut recklessly down the open slope and across the gulch to the next ridge, where they again found cover. They had guessed, and rightly, that the Circle T men would have their hands full near the north slope, and would leave the other unwatched. That the Bar Box D men were thus weakened by the loss of three men, and left leaderless, gave no concern to their foreman — when has a desperado not been willing to use his tools as cat's-paws?

As little Sammy had dashed from the cedars, he had probably seen the fugitives disappear on the other side of the gulch, for he had thrown his horse forward faster than before, and had ridden recklessly down the slope. Ben looked very grave as he turned to the Mormon:

"They shore must have stopped to look back before they rode into the cedars over there. They couldn't help seeing him."

"Shore they saw him!" The Mormon shook his head, and spurred still faster down the slope into the gulch. "I look to find him lyin' in the cedars over there, full of holes. That big blood-bay he rides is one horse I'd shore hate to see unsaddled on the off side!" he added.

BEN did not answer, for their horses were now puffing up the steep incline on the other side. They reached the trees, and swung their horses apart, trotting slowly in little circles, scanning the soft ground carefully as they bent low. Then they came together again, and after exchanging a queer, puzzled look, dashed off once more on the trail.

"What you make of it, anyway?" asked the Mormon in perplexity.

Ben shook his head gravely, baffled:

"I can't figure it out! They waited till he was near them, and then started off again. They couldn't have shot, or they'd have got him, an' he in the open down below them that way."

"Maybe," suggested Jake hopefully, "they're afraid to get him; he's too well liked, an' it would stir up a hornet's nest all over northern Arizona for 'em."

"No, that aint it." Again Ben shook his head. "They have money back of 'em, an' they've been gettin' away with so much they think they can do anything they want to."

"Then I reckon it must have been that they didn't want us to hear 'em shoot an' start after 'em. They jest wanted to lead him off out o' hearin' o' us an' get him."

"Looks like it," muttered Ben. "If they hurt little Sammy, the Circle T will get every danged one of 'em, if we have to follow 'em to hell."

The trailing was easy here in the cedar humus, and the two crashed their way recklessly. Mormon Jake turned to Ben bitterly:

"We're not makin' any more racket than a cyclone, are we? If they don't lay for us in the brush an' get us before we know they're around—well, they're losin' the chance of a lifetime."

Ben grunted assent as his horse dashed against a dead limb, breaking it with a sound like a pistol-shot. Still, both spurred all the faster through the grasping, tearing branches.

The trail swung toward the head of the ridge, and sharply around the next gulch to the cedar brake of the Lower Mesa, as it was called. Then it turned slightly to the left again.

"They're headin' for the Upper Mesa," grunted the Mormon. "Want to hide their tracks in the rocks up there."

"Fine chance they have! I could track them there myself—or anywhere else as long as they stick to their horses. I've seen you beat Indians at trailin'."

"Yes, but if they twist around much, it'll slow us up so much that they may get away—likely that's what they're figuring on. They'll shake Sammy, anyway."

"Do they want to shake him?" grunted Ben. "They've got somethin' or other up their sleeves for Sammy, but danged if I can figure out what it is. They could have got him long ago if they'd wanted to."

They crashed their way onward until they were almost at the foot of the

short, steep trail leading to the Upper Mesa. Here the cedars began to grow thinner. Suddenly Ben threw his horse back.

"They got him!" he exclaimed bitterly. "Poor little Sammy!"

The ground in a little opening was torn up by the hoofs of shod horses. In the middle of the clearing lay Sammy's hat, and beside it a sack of tobacco that had dropped from his pocket. There was a black-looking stain on the cedar humus, but on the stones the stain was a red color that could not be mistaken. Where the trail left the open, the ground was sandy, and in it the tracks of four horses could be plainly seen.

"So that's what they wanted," murmured Ben. "They wanted his horse, an' they wouldn't have been able to get it if they'd shot him on the open hillside back there—they'd have had to go back to catch it."

Both men had been leaning low in their saddles, peering under the branches.

"Wonder what they did with him." The Mormon's eyes were seeking everywhere. "Looks like they'd have left him lay. I suppose they hid him, an' thought we wouldn't know what they'd done."

"Let's circle around, an' be quick about it. We have to get after 'em. We can't help Sammy now."

A FEW minutes later, the men met, to look at each other blankly. It was Ben who spoke:

"They must have taken him with 'em! I can't see why they'd do that!"

He turned his horse, and with the Mormon at his heels dashed to the foot of the trail to the Upper Mesa. Here the steep ascent slowed his gait, as did also the knowledge that the chase now might be a long one that would try their horses. Soon he was climbing the last few feet, the trail running between two large boulders like great misshapen gate-posts.

"What's that?" he grunted suddenly.

In the middle of the trail a dirty piece of paper, probably a leaf from a tally-book, was thrust in a cleft stick. In an instant he was off his horse, and reading it. He handed it silently to the Mormon, who bent over it, trying to decipher the crooked writing:

If any of the Circle T boys get this, let him tell Ben Jurney to turn my boys aloose an ile turn Sammie aloose. Heel hav to call it quits an well do the same an stick to our own range. I wont sin this but heel know who wrote it.

"Thinks he's clever, not signing it!" muttered Ben, grimly thrusting the paper in his pocket. "As if anyone wouldn't know Red Billings' writin'."

"See here, Ben!" called Mormon Jake quietly.

He was off his horse, and bending close against a rough boulder. Ben knew from his grave tone that something was seriously wrong, and hurried to him.

"See there!"

BEN saw a little dab of blood on the stone, and a moment later, bending closer, the few gray, blood-stained hairs that clung to the granite.

"He's tied across his saddle," he murmured queerly. "He's dead, an' they want to make a bluff to get us to turn their men loose."

"Let's be goin', Ben." The Mormon's lips were drawn so stiff and tight that he could scarcely speak. "Let's be goin', Ben—I'd kinda like to see Red Billings an' those two men o' his this evenin'."

The two men rode out onto the mesa, scrutinizing the ground carefully. It was just as they had expected: the men ahead of them had separated temporarily and ridden in different directions, ridden slowly, so that the tracking was difficult.

"Take the trail of that feller leadin' Sammy's horse," said Ben. "I want to write a note for the boys an' leave it where we got that one—some of 'em are likely to find out what happened, and follow us as soon as they get those fellows tied back there."

A few moments later he joined the Mormon:

"I told 'em we'd leave a mark o' some kind where we left the mesa, so they could come right along after us, an' that if we could, we'd leave a blaze of some sort at any bad places in the trail."

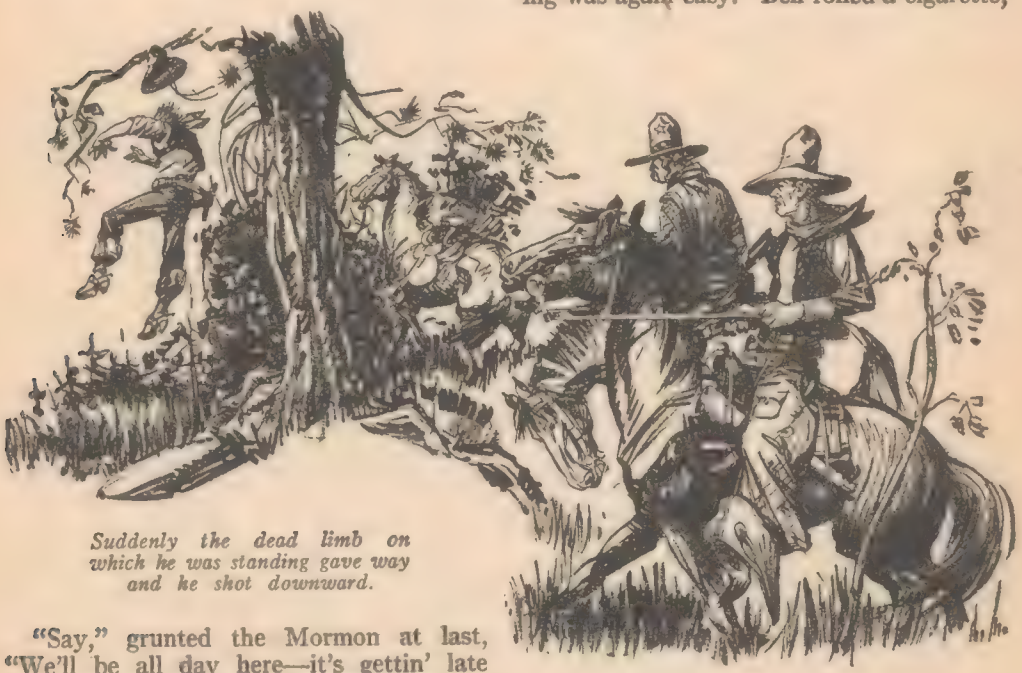
"Good! Some of 'em are pretty sure to be along."

Ben bent low over his saddle-horn to help Mormon Jake with the trailing. It was tedious business, for the Bar Box D men had been to particular pains to hide their trail here; they had turned in various directions, and picked the stoniest parts of the mesa. But they used the same tricks over and over again, so that

soon the pursuers learned what to expect. For instance, when the horses had been drawn to a very slow walk, to make tracking as difficult as possible, it invariably meant that the riders had seen a particularly stony place ahead, where they meant to turn back to one side or the other at a sharp angle.

ing Sammy's horse, and all had ridden down parallel to the trail by which they had come up. Ben quickly started a fire underneath a juniper log which would smoke for hours—his sign to any who might follow.

In a few minutes, he and the Mormon were back on the Lower Mesa, riding through the dense cedars where the tracking was again easy. Ben rolled a cigarette,



Suddenly the dead limb on which he was standing gave way and he shot downward.

"Say," grunted the Mormon at last, "We'll be all day here—it's gettin' late now. They seem to be headin' in the general direction of the east side over there. It looks like they're goin' to make a break for the high mountains. How about ridin' over an' cuttin' along the east rim for their tracks? It'll be dark before we leave here—at this rate."

Ben thought a long time, then shook his head:

"No," he murmured slowly, "it's a little too plain that they're headin' for the higher country. You're right, though, that we're wastin' time here. Let's cut back to where we started, an' ride along the west rim a ways."

The Mormon opened his mouth to dissent, but closed it again, and with a dubious look, fell in beside Ben as he turned back. They loped back to the head of the trail where they had come up, and swung southward along the rim at a brisk trot. They had gone less than a half-mile when they found the trail. The two others had joined the man lead-

and handed the tobacco and papers to the other. He puffed steadily as he swung ahead in a quick trot. Then he reined back beside the other:

"Mormon, I been figurin' a little. I don't think them fellers will get very far away till they see if we're goin' to turn their men loose. If they did, the others wouldn't know where to find 'em, an', anyway, if we'd call things quits, like they want to, they'd have no reason to leave the country."

Ben's cigarette had gone out, and he allowed the other to take the lead while he dug a match out of his pocket and relit it.

"I think you're right," muttered the Mormon, abstractedly, "I don't believe—"

Crack!

THE Mormon's horse plunged forward and upward, and then collapsed under his rider. There was a tang of powder-

smoke in the air. Ben threw himself from his saddle to the ground, alighting on his shoulder, for he had no doubt that another shot would come on the moment. He twisted to one knee, sending a stream of fire into the cedar from which the shot had come even as he did so. The Mormon was already firing.

"Rush 'em!" grunted Ben.

They sprang forward, crouching, guns ready for instant action, one around each side of the big cedar. They met on the other side, staring blankly at each other. There was no one there, and the trees were not so dense that a man could have escaped unseen or unheard since the shot had been fired.

"What—where—" gasped the Mormon, staring around bewildered.

"We must have got him," murmured Ben doubtfully, although he could not fail to see that there was no one, dead or alive, in the cedar.

"Did your own gun go off?" asked Ben, although he knew that was not the answer.

"Heck, no! Anyway, it was on the other side."

Again the men stared at each other blankly. The shot had come from so close that the Mormon had felt the blast of the powder, but there had been no one there who could have fired the shot.

"Say!" grunted the Mormon, "there's somethin' queer! I can't understand—"

"There!"

Ben was pointing into the cedar, where the sun glinted on metal. The other stepped forward and peered in astonishment.

"A trap-gun!" he exclaimed in amazement.

A MOMENT later, and they were hastily inspecting the carbine which had been lashed solidly to the limbs of the tree, with green branches around it to conceal it. From the trigger dangled the end of the string which the Mormon's horse had broken.

"Why didn't they point it higher?" wondered the Mormon. "They'd have got me instead o' the horse—likely they was figuring on gettin' you—thinkin' you'd be in the lead."

In a moment he continued:

"Maybe they didn't want to get you—maybe they're gettin' scared they'll stir up too much trouble for 'emselves. They figured on gettin' all of us this mornin', but they came out the small end of the horn, so far."

"Maybe," muttered Ben. "But a horse is a bigger mark than a man for a trap-gun—they'd be sure o' gettin' the horse. Say!" he broke off. "You're shot!"

For the first time the other realized that his left chap-leg was wet with blood. He felt carefully, and shook his leg.

"It's nothin'—just grazed me above the knee. I can walk back to the Circle T all right. You'd better be goin' on."

"I hate to leave you afoot an' shot this way, but you know how it is."

"Shore! That's all right—nothin' else to do. Good luck to you—an' watch out for other trap-guns!"

"Adios."

BEN was already disappearing in the cedars, his eyes fixed ahead of him and down, watching not only for the tracks, but also for innocent-looking strings across the trail. He reasoned, however, that another trap-gun would be unlikely to be found, as Red Billings would know that the pursuers would be on their guard, and he would hesitate to leave behind another valuable carbine.

For a little over a mile he swung along rapidly, the trail being easy to follow. Then the tracks swung abruptly to the right, and down a long, narrow opening that was clear as a wagon-road. These openings are frequently found in the cedar-brakes, but this one was unusually long, straight, and free from obstructions of any sort.

The tracks of the four horses showed very plainly in the bare, sandy ground. Ben could even see where they left the other end of the opening to disappear in the trees again, although that was a long distance off. Easy tracking, here! Ben lounged back in the saddle and reached for his tobacco and papers.

Suddenly an uneasy feeling swept Ben, and his hand dropped hastily from the pocket that held the tobacco. He jerked erect. What was the matter? Perhaps it was that queer feeling one gets from being watched by a hidden observer. Perhaps it was that the trail was just a little too straight, too plain, too easy to follow.

Upon the impulse of the moment, and without really stopping to reason why, Ben dashed the spurs into his tired horse's flanks, and simultaneously jerked the rein against the left side of its neck. The

startled horse, with the agility of the well-trained cutting horse that he was, lurched sideways into the cedars without the slightest hesitation or seeming preparation of tautening muscles.

Then, with a squeal, he plunged under the limbs of a big tree, almost dragging Ben from the saddle. A bullet had burned his thigh. Another had clipped a little piece from the brim of Ben's hat. It had been a narrow escape!

Crack! The Mormon's horse plunged forward and then collapsed under his rider. Ben threw himself to the ground, firing as he did so.

He again whirled his horse, this time to the left. There was another opening running roughly parallel to the first. It was not nearly so straight nor clear, but a running horse would make far less noise there than in the trees. Ben dashed down this opening. Suddenly he swung around a curve, and his gun jerked up, to bark quickly. A thick-set, dark-faced man slumped down beside the horse he had been preparing to mount hastily, his six-shooter dropping from his limp hand as he fell. Ben recognized him for Black Dick Kelley, Red Billings' right-hand man, and a noted gun-man.

But a second man had already mounted, and his bullet missed Ben by less than an inch. Another bullet grazed Ben's ribs just under the left armpit. Then Ben shot again, only to miss. The distance was too great for offhand shooting—the sights must be used.

This Ben realized, and took quick but sure aim while two hasty shots from the other missed by a wide margin. Then Ben's gun cracked again, and the other plunged out on his startled horse's neck, to tumble kicking to the ground. That had been Tex Dunn, a gun-man of the bush-whacking type, who had not nerve enough nor skill enough to shoot it out with a man in the open, unless, as here, he knew that to turn his back was fatal.

Two more horses were tied side by side. Ben gasped as he saw the little figure erect on the big blood-bay. It was old Sammy Hopkins, a dirty, blood-stained bandanna tied around his head, and caked blood down one side of his face and over one shoulder. The little man's hands were tied to his saddle-horn, and his feet were lashed together under the horse's chest, by a long buckskin thong. Ben thrust his gun in the holster and leaped from his horse beside his little partner, jerking out his knife as he did so.

"Thought they'd killed you!" he gasped.

"Nope. Roped me from the brush an' jerked me off'n my horse. I lit on my head on a rock, an' woke up on the Upper Mesa, tied across my saddle. Nope, they didn't

kill me, but I lost my tobacco, and they wouldn't give me a smoke, dang 'em."

BEN glanced approvingly at the little man. His face was white as a sheet, from shock and loss of blood, but he was game as ever, pretending that the only thing bothering him was the loss of his tobacco.

"Where's Red?" Ben grunted. He had been searching the cedars with his eyes while he released Sammy.

"Dunno. Ran, I reckon."

"No." Ben shook his head. "I don't think he'd leave his horse an' saddle here. Here, take this gun." He handed him Black Dick's. "Keep a look out for him, while I take a circle in the trees—he wont be far off."

He stepped quickly away—he would make less noise afoot—and hurried through the cedars toward the long opening where the others had lain in ambush. At the edge of the opening he paused, listening carefully, and then parted the thick, soft branches of the cedars, to step silently into the clearing. As he did so, a red-headed, thick-necked man burst through the green of the other side. The sudden meeting was not expected by either; for a moment they stood stock still. Then Ben spoke:

"Don't shoot, Red! Jest give up, an' I'll guarantee that you get to jail all right—that none o' the boys string you up."

An evil grin twisted the red face.

"Hell of a lot of good it would do me! They'd string me up after, jest the same."

"Well, you'd get a fair trial."

"Trial, hell! I wont be taken in alive. Ben Jurney, you can—"

Without warning, his hand flashed to his hip, and up again. But Ben had been expecting this. He had even thought the matter out hastily: he would like to bring Red Billings in alive, and that would mean a shot through the arm or right shoulder. But this he knew he dared not risk—Red was reputed to be the fastest gun-man in that part of Arizona, at least. It had to be a paralyzing shot. His six-shooter flashed. Red doubled forward, his bullet kicking up a spurt of sand at his own feet.

Ben winced, and turned away from the writhing figure on the ground. He reloaded his gun, and turned back, forcing his eyes to Red. Then he leaped forward with a surprised grunt. The wounded man had been trying to reach his gun, where it lay on the ground, and had almost succeeded before Ben's foot dashed it away—he could not shoot at that doubled-up figure.

Ben stared in amazement at the man below him on the ground—such vitality he had never before heard of. Then he started; there was no blood on the hands that clutched the abdomen! Bleeding internally, probably.

Suddenly Ben's eye fell on the big, twisted belt-buckle, and the truth flashed to him. That buckle had deflected the bullet! It was the impact of the bullet against the metal that had disabled Red, and he was rapidly recovering. With a bound, Ben was upon the other. A moment more, and he had his hands tied behind his back with a bandanna.

"Well, Red," he grunted, "I reckon you'll stand trial an' swing, after all."

HE turned, as a group of horsemen came dashing down the long opening, the sheriff in the lead, with his right arm in a sling.

"Good work, Ben!" grunted the sheriff. "I came back from town this mornin', after havin' my arm fixed up, more to have the law on your side than because I thought I could help. I heard the shootin' on Indian Hill, an' got there jest as your men got the others tied up. Then I followed you with 'em."

Mormon Jake rode up on a horse he had borrowed from one of the others.

"Why didn't you kill him?" he demanded angrily of Ben.

Then, receiving no answer, he continued:

"Well, anyway, they're all accounted for but Black Dick an' Tex."

"Nope," Sammy rode out of the cedars, looking very white and tired, but with a cheerful grin on his face. "Ben got 'em—they're a-layin' back there."

The group of horsemen stared at him in amazement.

"I—I thought they'd got you!" some one gasped.

"Nope! I told 'em Ben would get 'em for draggin' me off my horse an' skinnin' up my head that way, but they jest laughed at me. They don't know Ben like I do—he always bobs up at the right time, Ben does."

The sheriff tried to hide a grin at the old cow-man's sublime confidence in his broad-shouldered young partner.

"Anyway, Sammy," he muttered, "the county has one thing to thank Ben for—that it has seen the end of the Bar Box D."

The Trail of Rapture

There's no more beautiful sight than a full-rigged ship in the moonlight—and there have been few adventures more thrilling than that which befell Blackmore aboard her.

By FRANK SHAW

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

BLACKMORE had stared out of his library window a thousand times, out over the stretch of sea lying calm or fretted beneath, towards the white-wreathed fangs of the Boulderstone, but never once, to his certain knowledge, had he felt so much as a stirring of the sea-fret that had drawn him from his home thirty years before to do hazardous business on great waters. He was quite sure of himself; the comfortable land had its grip on him; the sea, with its privations, its hazards and its lonely bleakness, was a thing of long ago.

He walked toward the deeply embrasured window on this particular night full of confidence, if he gave the matter so much as a thought. He had dined well, served perfectly by sleek, perfect servants—the outward and visible sign of his worldly success. The last post had brought him an intimation that a high honor was soon to be conferred on him.

In addition, he had reason to believe that Marianne Vandrennan would look kindly on the offer he intended to make her to become mistress of Grange Holt. A man who had arrived so completely as had Howard Blackmore could afford to contemplate suitable matrimony after a lifetime of effort. He genuinely admired Marianne, and often, over a cigar, pictured how gracious the big house would be when invested with her presence. Forty-five years old and a success—not so bad, that, for a man who'd run away to sea at fifteen, and had a hell of a time of it!

Casually he drew the heavy curtain aside and gazed out through that casement that gave on the foam of perilous seas. He was familiar with the outlook

—from the revolving light on Cape Tolton to the jewel-like lamps of the pier.

Suddenly something caught him by the heart-strings and he realized that he was shaking, as he turned inward to satisfy himself of the concreteness of things.

He stared at the rich furnishings of his library, which lay inviting under the shaded lights. He brooded on the snapping driftwood fire on the wide old hearth —it was good, all of it was good; but—

He turned again to stare from the window. The tug that he had derided came afresh to his heart. Lying there in the wide silvery moon-track was a stately ship —a windjammer, her canvas silvered and made mystical by the evening's luminary. She floated idly, temporarily becalmed, the illuminated water glinting against her side. Probably enough full daylight would have revealed her a commonplace object enough, a thing of shreds and patches, with rusted sides and much dishevelment; but the moon glorified her into an argosy of all romance.

THE sea was calling; it seemed to him that shadowy hands were beckoning him again to move up and out upon the fierce old trail of rapture. What the most majestic liners had failed to stir, the glamorous, silvered canvas of the mysterious ship below stirred—the wild, resistless craving for movement and battle and adventure.

"I've been a traitor to the hard old sea," Howard Blackmore muttered, and saw himself again as he had been before Fortune smiled upon him on account of that piece of reckless, impossible salvage work that had founded his circumstances on success's solid rock. Then, fifteen years before—or was it fifteen centuries?—he'd been Hardcase Blackmore, a man who got what he wanted and made men do the things he wanted done—a slave-driver when the need arose, a sail-dragger, a hell-for-leather shipmaster, who feared man no more than he feared the worst the elements could do. His name had been a byword along the world's waterfronts for reckless dare-deviltry—only Hardcase Blackmore could have salvaged the *Rottingdean*, men said; any other must have recognized the impossibility of the work. But Blackmore had achieved the impossible, by dint of fierce determination and a refusal to admit defeat; and he was here now at Grange Holt, the finest of many fine houses along that stretch of the coast—a made man.

"Good God!" he ejaculated, staring at the ship, pulses drumming in his temples—for he had seen a sudden thin thread of light stab the moon-twilight. That shot, he saw, was fired on the ship's main-deck. Like the old mad days, that—pistol-shots aboard a windjammer!

The correct thing for Blackmore to do, as a justice of the peace and a respectable member of society, was to lift the telephone receiver from its hook and inform the local police and harbor authorities that something was amiss aboard a sailing-ship becalmed in Portnor Bay.

The bluff cliff on which Grange Holt was perched would shut out any sight of the ship from the port three miles distant and from anywhere save such a height as this window, the bulwarks of the ship must have concealed the flash. Like as not it was some reckless youngster monkeying about with firearms—he tinglingly remembered the first revolver of his boyhood—or maybe he'd been mistaken. No—staring shipward again he saw another thin flash, and seemed to see shadowy shapes moving rapidly.

"Wish to the Lord I was aboard her!" he thought. Then: "Why shouldn't I be? Why not?" He understood that he would have to go. The trail of rapture was spread for the treading of his eager, restless feet, and he must obey the call. The smug, satisfying years dropped from him as if by magic, things of cloud-like worthlessness, and once more at heart he was Hardcase Blackmore—a man who did worth-while things. He laughed—as men had heard him laugh in the teeth of a cyclone. He moved to his desk and opened a drawer, pocketed a heavy automatic pistol that he found; he threw off his dinner-jacket and slipped on an old golf-coat that was always kept handy.

At the door he encountered his man Frobisher, entering sleekly, anxious to perform last offices before retiring.

"Going out, sir?" Frobisher asked. Frobisher was hardly likely to approve of such an escapade as Blackmore anticipated in answer to the sea-call.

"H'm—yes, just for a stroll. Don't wait up," replied the master.

"Very good, sir. You have your key, sir?" He was never allowed to forget anything; these people were paid to think for him—not like the old days when he

Blackmore secured a firm hold of a human torso and flung his captive fairly at the pistol-wielder.

had to think for everybody in the ship as well as for himself.

"Yes, yes—good night!" He almost ran down the drive and to the little cliff-patch that gave on his own private cove. What he had in mind he could not tell; but somehow this fret and wildness must be stilled, lulled into quietude. He'd just content himself with a glimpse of a ship's deck, the acrid stink of Stockholm tar and bilge-water; and then—waken from this madness to sanity again.

He burst open the door of his boathouse without ceremony, turned on a light and considered the craft lying there. A magnificent motor-launch for one—nickeled and wonderful—jeweled in every hole, almost! But his motor-mechanic had dismantled the engine of the little-used craft; a glance told Blackmore it was useless for his present purpose. The twenty-foot sailing-boat was equally useless, for lack of wind. There was the little twelve-foot dinghy: a very bourgeois amongst boats; a seaworthy old tub that he had used on first settling down.

"She'll do!" he said, and found paddles. He laughed then, a deep-throated chuckle, as he sculled the tubby craft out of the covered dock. There was a smell of salt water in his nostrils, keen and compelling. But it was not that at which he laughed: it was at the fact that his heart was not case-hardened against the call of the sea. The years seemed to vanish in a breath; now he was just a sailorman after a ship, and pulling like the devil in case he missed his passage. A thin waft of a breeze tickled his cheek as he pulled, settling to the chopping stroke of open water; he looked anxiously over his shoulder and put a little more weight to the paddles. If the breeze freshened he might as well hope to fly upward and become an angel, as to catch that full-rigged craft whose every stitch of canvas showed to the silvered night. But the puff passed and the sea again shone unruffled. The night held joyous madness between its ghostly fingers.

BLACKMORE pulled steadily; the light craft flew through the water like a steam launch. The well-oiled row-locks and the greased leathers of the paddles made no sound worth mentioning and the *chug-chug* of the lifting and falling boat was a sound barely distinguishable from the night's other sounds: the fret of the everlasting surf on distant rocks, the brooding murmur of the sea itself, and the distance-lessened hum of the town.

But remembering the pistol-shots he'd seen from his window, scenting mutiny or some such outbreak, Blackmore eased his pull as the ship loomed higher and nearer. His natural inclination on approaching a ship was to give the real captain's hail: *"Ship aho-o-oy!"* and demand assistance in boarding; but pistol-using men might conceivably count his visit an intrusion, and keep him off. A man in a boat was at a disadvantage with men behind bulwarks.

He rested on his oars and looked closely: The nationality of the ship was indeterminate, since she flew no flag. British in origin he named her—but were not almost all British windjammers long ago sold out to foreigners? Blackmore's seamanly eye told him her yards were indifferently trimmed, her canvas fitted its spars but badly. At the distance a fairy ship, at close quarters she seemed a vagabond—but a windjammer none the less, and as such beautiful.

He paddled lightly toward her—common sense breaking his early impulse. All said and done, it was one thing to answer that compelling call and break away from the opulence of his home; but it was another to board a strange ship at this late hour with no sort of excuse at all. Then a short, deep-throated cry that might have sounded alarm supplied the necessary spur. He bent to his oars and ran softly alongside the listless ship's side, beneath the outjutting bumpkin on the port side. He noticed that one of her sea-boats was roughly hauled up in the davits but not swung aboard and housed, as he noticed that no ladder swung overside. He leaped upwards at the projecting bumpkin and caught it; and though the years had to some extent softened his muscles, he found no great difficulty in swinging himself to a sitting posture.

A small round scuttle was at the level of his shoulder as he sat there, and it was illuminated. As the strange ship rolled gently to the bidding of some unseen swell, the drawn curtain gaped. Blackmore looked into an ordinary cabin—badly painted in a vile yellow color; a mean berth enough, such as would have housed a petty officer in his day, say. So much he saw; then he gasped.

There was a woman seated on the settee that ran from the bunk to the inner bulkhead—she was in disheveled evening dress, she was young and she was beautiful. Furthermore a coarse and unclean sailor's handkerchief was knotted about her mouth; and from the posture of her arms it was apparent she was bound.

Blackmore became Hardcase Blackmore again—a man indifferent to consequences, an actionful man, impetuous and irresistible. Tightly bound beautiful women in evening dress were out of place aboard an old windjamming freighter of this type!

HE tested the scuttle, but found the locking bolts screwed tightly home. He rapped on the toughened glass, but the bound woman's eyes did not turn in his direction. There being nothing to be gained in this way, he stood on the bumpkin and with his eyes on the level with the covering board of the poop, scrutinized the deck. He saw a man hanging listlessly over the idle, kicking wheel, but no other human being was visible. Mentally he anathematized the crew as a lubberly pack of no-goods; but instinctively he climbed aboard over the poop-rail, and silently laughed again as his lightly shod feet felt the comforting spring of a deck beneath them.

A faint flutter of wind caused the pendant canvas to lift once and then dropped to listlessness afresh, with a long-drawn sigh and a faint tap-tap of reefpoints. As Blackmore sighed in sympathy two men came struggling up the companionway, to reel across the deck to starboard and to fall locked in a close grapple. Two other men followed, not struggling. They slithered to starboard and seemed to await the issue of the struggle; obviously, then, the odds were three to one. Just as Blackmore reached this interesting conclusion the sails whispered again, lifted, swelled—and the clear harping of the breeze sounded in the rigging aloft. One of the two spectators plunged aft to the wheel, barking an order in a language that Blackmore but faintly understood; and the wheel-spokes spun.

"Russian, by gad!" said Blackmore, with memory carrying him to the Black Sea ports. "H'm—interesting!"

He crossed the deck in two swift strides, and snatched at a wrist, as a glimmer of bared steel showed in the moonlight. Whatever the right or wrong of the matter, he wouldn't stand for knife-work. But as he gripped a leathery wrist and jerked its owner backward and half-across his knee, the one who had raced to the wheel returned. He shouted something as he realized that Blackmore was a stranger and bright metal showed instantly in his hand—a pistol, not a knife.

BLACKMORE was a man trained in emergency to cope with emergency. Retaining a viselike grip on the knife-owner's wrist, he drew that worthy's body across his own as a shield, and said cheerfully: "Go on, then—shoot!"

"Ah—cursed English, yess!" hissed the pistol-bearer. "Go to hell!"

The pair on the deck still writhed and struggled; and it was possible to see that the man underneath was attired in conventional, if much-crumpled evening dress. The situation promised interest, Blackmore thought—the black-clad man would be the companion to the woman in the prison-cabin—therefore Blackmore's sympathies were immediately with him.

Things happened swiftly; Blackmore was a big man and strong, and he had been trained in the handling of weights. Still gripping the leathery wrist he secured a firm hold of a human torso and flung his captive fairly at the pistol-wielder. Then, whilst they were still entangled, he reached down and yanked the uppermost of the pair on deck away from his place. His blood warmed as he did it; and he was again Hardcase Blackmore—the man who had licked a mutinous crew single-handed, and unarmed.

"Get up!" he commanded the man; "and tell me what's wrong!" His free hand dropped to his pocket, and he made what might to another man have been a disconcerting discovery. He had heard a splash as he swung on the bumpkin, but had ignored it—now he realized it had meant the disappearance of his pistol.

Before the man on the deck could do more than struggle to his knees, the two previous spectators hurled themselves on Blackmore. To defend himself against the attack it was necessary to get the third and comparatively passive man out of the way; Blackmore slung him like a sack of shakings to the waterway, stepped and struck briskly, felt the impact of his fist on a human face—struck left-handed, a glancing blow. Then a yelling arose—there was a rush of feet, and Blackmore felt the dull *whizz* of a heavy object pass his ear and reach his shoulder in a crushing blow. The canvas aloft was now booming merrily, and the harping of wind in the spars and rigging was like a clarion-call to battle.

Blackmore, staggered, found himself fighting half-blindly—the honest to goodness rough-house fighting of old windjammer days. Men were hurling towards him out of the half-light, a seemingly limitless pack. There were slattings and bangings aloft, and the clean rasp of broken water spanking the ship's sides—the atmosphere of olden days. The hours of opulent ease might never have been—he was Hardcase Blackmore once more in his element: the center of a storm-zone. He shouted as he fought, his back to the rails.

But even Blackmore could not prevail against the vicious crowd. He was struck by something heavily thrown, and came to his knees. He gathered dimly from the yells that they wanted him thrown overboard or his throat cut—then a sense of lazy indifference descended upon him.

HE aroused from this in dim daylight that came vaguely through an unclean scuttle, revealing the ship's sail-locker, and it was in a disgusting state of filthiness. It sickened his sailorly soul to see the rank waste and uncleanness; and he swore softly but determinedly through locked teeth.

"It is the ill-fortune of war," said a voice near at hand—a gentleman's voice.

"Who're you?" Blackmore screwed his head around, wishing that head wouldn't ache so excruciatingly. He felt as he had felt in youth after a paying-off spree. He saw a grave-faced youngish man in disordered evening dress, with dried blood on his cheeks. This youngish man smiled.

"I'm Serge Popolouff," he said.

"Russian?"

"Yes—was. Royalist Russian. You helped me overnight; I am grateful."

Like all educated Russians he spoke flawless English.

"Why didn't they heave me overboard as they wanted to?" inquired Blackmore curiously.

"I think they have some notion of holding you to ransom. You are in evening dress; to such *canaille* anyone dressed decently is wealthy. They are unscrupulous. How did you come aboard?"

"Oh," said Blackmore, with a rumbling chuckle, "I just came—sort of." He remembered how the moon-glint on the spread canvas had summoned him to follow the trail of rapture. Uncertain though his situation was, he wasn't unhappy. Life ashore couldn't offer such crowded hours as had recently passed, such crowded hours as were still to come, if he knew anything—for he was too vital a force to be kept down, as was witnessed by his presence here at this moment—he whom the land had tried through monotonous years to chain into slavery!

"Hist!" said Popolouff; but Blackmore

had already heard the sound of approaching footsteps. The sail-locker hatch was opened, and faces appeared in the vivid square of daylight. One man reluctantly descended, after shouting something in Russian, which Blackmore barely understood. It was a warning that if any treachery occurred there would be a general massacre.

The man who descended with a pitcher of water and a plateful of flinty hardtack, bore traces of ill-usage. He scowled at Blackmore.

"How do you expect tied men to eat and drink?" asked the follower of the rapturous trail. It was a natural question; he had already made the discovery that his hands were linked behind him—fortunately, so he thought, with rope and not with steel. Not that steel would have chilled his courage or lessened his determination to fight free.

"Silence, dog!" growled the jailer, and set the sole of his boot savagely against Blackmore's face. "Drink and eat like dogs for all of me!" He spat revoltingly in the face of Serge Popolouff and hoarse laughter from the hatchway greeted the action. The thought ran in Blackmore's brain: "I wonder if they're treating that woman this way!" It was succeeded by another: "If they are, God help them when I get free!"

He had only caught one glance of the female prisoner; but she had been beautiful even in her bonds. He determined to free himself as speedily as possible. Their attendant was filthy of person, and they were glad when he had climbed the ladder and closed the hatch. Blackmore, despite his aches and weariness, was a man of action. He wasted no time in discussion, but tediously hitched himself across the littered floor until his back was toward Serge's.

"Let's get a chance at your fastenings!" he growled; and contrived to use his half-numbed fingers. The knots were hard, but gradually he eased them, and presently Serge sighed in relief, and the bonds dropped clear.

"Give me a drink of water for pity's sake!" Blackmore said. "Then untie me." The water pitcher was held to his lips, and though the contents were stale and tainted with cement and rusty iron, the draught was as nectar; it refreshed him and restored any courage he might have lost. Serge drank, and then applied his slim fingers to Blackmore's bonds. Presently they were both munching the flinty biscuits, explaining to each other between gulped mouthfuls.

"It is an effort on the part of these men to secure our family treasure," Serge explained. "We considered ourselves safe in England—but they must have watched us very closely. We were too sure of ourselves."

"England ought to have kept you safer than this," growled Blackmore, scrutinizing his surroundings with expert eyes. "As an Englishman I apologize. If you've claimed our hospitality it's up to me to do something. You're aristocrats, of course, you and your wife?"

"My sister is—or was—a princess," replied Popolouff casually.

CURIOUS, Blackmore thought, what a feeling of relief that simple change of noun brought! He was in no wise interested in the woman save that she was helpless and thus naturally an object for sympathy, he assured himself; but—she had been beautiful in her distress.

"A princess without a principality," added Serge; "and myself in no better case. We escaped with our bare lives from the massacres, when Sonia was only a child. But we found friends and assistance. I have no complaint against England. We were too careless, that is all. Russian criminals are cunning, especially where money is concerned; also they have long memories for treasure. I do not know how this abduction was engineered; but only last night, when Sonia and I were on the terrace of the Flamboyant Hotel at Weirmouth, we were set upon by men who leaped from the shrubbery, smothered in blankets and carried to a waiting boat. Then we were brought to this ship—"

"Weirmouth's a dud place, anyhow," commented Blackmore. "The harbor police are always asleep there. I could tell you things about that place. Good thing the wind fell light when it did, though. I may be able to help."

"You have already tried, sir, and nobly."

"I haven't properly begun yet, if you ask me anything. I was looking from my window and saw the ship in the moonlight—good to see. Old tug came to my heart; I'd simply got to look at this ship at close quarters. I was once a sailor—windjammer man. Then I saw the pistol-

flashes—that would be you, Prince, I take it?"

"I got free for a few moments and contrived to secure a revolver; but they overpowered me. I shot one man, however—I hope I killed him. Then after they had disarmed me and taken me below, I endeavored again to escape, hoping to leap overboard and swim for assistance. Then you arrived—fortuitously."

Blackmore grew thoughtful. "How do they expect to get you to disclose the whereabouts of your treasure?" he asked.

"Oh, they have their simple ways, sir. Torture is not extinct in Russia, I believe. For myself I could not answer. I particularly directed my sister that she should never disclose to me the exact whereabouts of the hoard. Not that it is a treasure such as they imagine. We were never rich—but they allow their imaginations to play tricks with them."

"So you think they might torture the Princess to find out where the stuff's hidden?"

"I do not think—I *know!* One hears stories from refugees. Those desperadoes have the souls of brutes. They need the money and they will have it, by hook or by crook. I would rather Sonia died than remain in their hands."

"It would certainly be better, Prince," agreed Blackmore gravely. "But there are two of us; and those cut-throats up above think we're close prisoners. The element of surprise is with us. We know they're on watch and free; what they think they know is all wrong. It's good to be on shipboard again—it helps a man to think."

He cocked an appreciative ear to listen to old familiar ship-sounds—the slow creak of timbers, the chatter of loose iron, the plash and thump of water against the skin of the ship and the occasional rasp of a wind-flung spray-wisp on the deck overhead. Judging by the sounds the ship

The heavy clew took him fairly at the back of the neck. "You've killed him!" said Serge, amazed.

—name unknown—was feeling the weight of a lively breeze. She would be heading up-channel; and if she sailed as well as she ought to, would soon be past the Straits and making for the wider waters of the North Sea. The sooner something was done the better, Blackmore decided.

"Let's review the situation," he said aloud. "I'm a one-time sailor. Hard-case Blackmore, they called me. I'm a bit out of practice, but not despairing. You'll excuse me if I say that I never held much stock in squareheads in my sea-going days."

"Howard Blackmore?" asked Serge, with an air of enlightenment. "The—the millionaire?"

"I own a million, I believe, yes. It's as much use to me now as a musket is to a cow. Leave out the million—I've got two hands, two feet and a head-piece trained to deal with nautical problems. This is a nautical problem; it is happening at sea. May I count on you to back me up in anything I do?"

"To the death, yes. Not that I had entirely despaired of discovering a way; all said and done, we did escape from the Revolution! It was the fact of the ship that deterred me; my sister cannot swim."

"The way I look at it, she wont need to try to swim a stroke," Blackmore said encouragingly. "Now, we're free after a fashion. That hatch there leads down to the lazarette; if this ship is like other ships —and as she's Clyde-built she probably will be—I will bet a hat there is another hatch leading out into the saloon. If not that, there'll be a bulkhead door into the 'tween-decks. These swine don't know I'm a sailor; they'll have forgotten to fasten those outlets, if I know anything. We'd be the better for a pistol or two in the coming doings, but we can't expect too much."

"Hist!" whispered Serge. Footsteps approached the upper hatch; there was the clash of the batten being thrown down.

Blackmore slithered across the floor and took up his old position, with his hands, though free, linked behind him. "Pretend you're still bound!" he advised.

The hatch opened, to show again the bearded, dirty faces; again a man descended, a man of thirty or thereabouts, and handsome under the blood and grime, for this man also bore evidences of ill-usage. A revolver was in his belt, and he scowled malignantly at the prisoners. The hatch was closed down after him.

"Now, talk at will," growled the newcomer in English.

"Ah—a spy, eh?" asked Serge. Blackmore said nothing. The immediate presence of this armed man promised to increase difficulties; but the fine tingle in his blood told him that difficulties existed only to be overcome.

"Go on—speak, as you spoke before," jeered the watcher, his hand on his pistol-butt. Blackmore began to covet that weapon—a handy tool in a general mêlee! He fidgeted where he sat, his back against a rolled-up sail. The littered state of the sail-locker might prove less displeasing now, he fancied. There were old iron clews here and there—weighty trifles. There was a discarded topsail clew, for instance, less than a dozen feet away. He had marked it already as a weapon; it became more desirable now.

"Speak French?" he asked Serge casually.

The custodian studied their faces, his own blank and puzzled. Obviously the tongue of diplomacy and romance was unknown to him.

Serge nodded.

"Keep him talking; get him in a rage, if you can," said Blackmore; "occupy his attention for five minutes."

Serge smiled falsely, and animatedly said: "I will do my best." Then he spat a venomous curse at their jailer, and followed it with another. Blackmore hitched himself a foot nearer the clew. Serge, perceiving the action, continued to taunt the sailor until the pistol was drawn and flourished menacingly.

"Pig of a Royalist, but speak again, and I shoot!" growled the Russian. "I have shot many—women and children! I am not afraid!"

Blackmore worked himself a little nearer to the clew. He did it imperceptibly, feeling a hunger for the weighty implement. Presently he estimated that with a grab he could touch it. To fail meant that Serge would be instantly shot by the braggart. Therefore he must not fail—this man who had known how to fling a belaying-pin so accurately that he could almost without fail hit a recalcitrant seaman on any selected point.

"Even now, I think I shall shoot!" growled the sailor. "It is long since I pulled a trig—"

THE heavy clew took him fairly at the back of the neck. He croaked and gurgled; his head wagged limply to one side.

"You've killed him!" said Serge, amazed.

Law-abiding Howard Blackmore, justice of the peace for the county, a man treated with respect by the police, said: "I hope to God I have, the perishing swine!" The clew had been pitched seemingly at hazard; a half-backward throw, but old skill is not easily lost, and Blackmore smiled happily.

"We're a full-sized gun the richer for that throw," he observed. "It's loaded, too—wonder if this bird's got any more shells?" He took the pistol and searched his limp victim.

"No cartridges—only oddments," he announced. "That's been a baby's silver comforter, if I know anything—dried blood still on it. If he's dead he's been executed. Well, Prince, here we are: Two men, four hands, one gun! And a ship at

our mercy! If they've kept your sister tied up all this time she'll be uncomfortable."

"If they detect us—"

Blackmore laughed. The sail-locker was full of useful oddments. There were odd lengths of wire rope scattered about; taking one of these he stranded it dexterously, and with one strand nipped quickly up the short ladder leading to the hatch. There was an eyebolt on the hinged hatch's underside, and another in the coaming. He ran the tough strand through and through the two, and turned in the ends.

"They'll need a fourfold purchase to get that scuttle open now," he observed. "Let's explore." He tugged at the lower hatch, which answered his demand and lifted. Sure enough, it communicated with the lazarette. As Blackmore stood gazing downward, the ship gave a wildish lurch, and the scream of wind above increased.

"Squall coming," he said. "That'll occupy them a bit—ha-ha! Shortening her down!" He sniffed like an old war-horse, his nostrils expanded. "Now's our time, while they're busy. Come on, Prince." He dipped down into the lazarette, full of evil scents—of stockfish chiefly, which caused Serge to gulp sickly.

"Sweet, isn't it?" remarked Blackmore. "I always housed the stockfish in the mizzen-top in my day—and even then it was bad enough. It's sort of matured down here, don't you think?"

He accustomed his eyes to the almost complete darkness below, then reached out a hand for Serge, and piloted him amongst stowed casks and cases. There were loud creakings and once a case took motion and slithered across the deck, missing their legs by an inch.

"No-sailor son of a gun they've got for mate here!" was Blackmore's comment. "Any man worth a curse would have lashed everything in Channel weather! Ha! Here's a ladder!" He had butted fairly into it, his head fetching sound from the timber. That blow in no wise sweetened his temper. Yet he admitted to himself that he was truly happy. None of the easy years ashore had ever given him this wholly joyous thrill. The old out-trail every time for delight!

He mounted the ladder and made inspection. But though he applied his back stoutly to the trap above, the increasing exertion of all his strength failed to shift it. This was a disappointment; he had hoped to gain the cabin and from there secure the mastery of the ship. But there are always two solutions to a problem, and he was in no wise daunted. He worked his way, still piloting Serge, to the forward bulkhead. If it were steel his hope was groundless. It proved to be wood: two-inch baulks, well-stayed with steel bolts and heavy clamps.

HIS fingers searched the butts, finding one slightly loose. He was a big, powerful man, and when he discovered a suitable cask, he swung it up from its position almost as if it had been a toy. The cask crashed down on the loosened butt; there was a creak and a splintering. He waited until the ship heeled fiercely again and brought down his battering-ram afresh, hoping the din outside would deaden the din he was making. Anyhow, these lubberly loafers would put it down to shifted cargo, as like as not! Half a dozen terrific swings of the cask, and the butt tore protestingly outward, leaving a space sufficient for a man's body to penetrate.

"So far, so good," said Blackmore, a bit winded, but optimistic. They entered the 'tween-decks, almost black dark, save that occasional glimmers of light showed at the feet of deck-ventilators, and made a deep twilight in certain areas. Above sounded the heavy-booted feet of toiling men. If they were now shortening sail, as seemed likely, most of the crew would be aloft, lightening their problem. It seemed advisable to make hay whilst the wind blew!

"But how to escape from this devilish hole!" exclaimed Serge.

"We'll do it," was the confident reply. "If not one way, then another."

Blackmore climbed a ladder giving to the after hatch-coamings, but met disappointment there—the hatch was battened securely down; too nearly under the eye of the afterguard, too, for any demonstration. The main hatch proved to be in like case. "And I'm too hefty to wriggle up a ventilator at my time of life," complained Hardcase Blackmore, "though I've done it often enough, too—looting cargo, eh? Let's try the fore-hatch."

Here was greater success, they found, after working a painful way over unkindly cargo. One hatch-cover had been lifted aside, probably to air the hold; the way to the upper deck was clear. Satisfying himself that his captured pistol was handy, Blackmore cautiously ascended the ladder,

and as cautiously thrust his head out. His first glance was for aloft—the men were up there, furling the topgallantsails, and in his critical judgment, making a left-handed job of it.

He vaulted out on deck, and hissed to Serge to follow his example; once there, with wisps of spindrift spraying them, they took cover under the topgallant forecastle, able to survey the full run of the ship's deck.

"Rummy—very!" muttered Blackmore. "Damned rum!—I wonder!" He turned to give the windlass a glance; and as he did so a locker door opened and a man emerged, obviously the mate, wearing a long oilskin coat. Blackmore was trained in emergency and had clean sloughed off his landwise caution. Environment counts for a lot, after all. He leaped and hit the man with his mighty fist—a pole-ax blow; the mate sank to his knees and rolled over without protest.

"I want his coat—camouflage, see?" Blackmore explained, stripping away the garment. "You bag his jacket." They attired themselves bizarrely, Serge sniffing in disgust at the foulness of his covering.

"Follow me!" ordered Blackmore, after banging the mate's head against the deck without any mistaken gentleness. They slipped along the lee deck, past the men's quarters and the galley. It was proving easier than might have been the case. They gained the mainmast without detection and were able to gain a glimpse of the wind-swept poop. Two men were there—apparently the captain and the helmsman. With his head bent, Blackmore suddenly sprinted along the deck and up the poop-ladder. The captain yelled something at him in unintelligible Russian; without lifting his head Blackmore rushed him, and the heel of the ship helping, dived and caught him by the knees, hurling him in a somersault to leeward where he crashed heavily into the scuppers.

"Sit on his head!" he yelled to Serge, and himself aimed for the helmsman. Serge, prompt to obey, pounded at the half-conscious captain, accompanying each blow with profanity—and Russian profanity can sound extremely venomous.

As Blackmore came for the man at the wheel, the latter had out an ugly knife, his blubber lips bared back from fanglike teeth. "I steek!" he threatened, shielding himself behind the wheel.

Hardcase Blackmore stepped sideways and in a flash had an iron belaying-pin out of the rail. The belaying-pin took the Russian squarely between the eyes and crumpled him. Being primarily a seaman, Blackmore took a turn round the wheel-spokes with the end of the boom sheet, to keep the working ship in some control; then hastened to assist Serge with the captain. He yanked the skipper out of the scuppers, ran him to the companionway, and flung him below, then followed hard, Serge a step behind.

AS they reached the cabins a woman's terrified scream sounded just ahead.

Blackmore spared a second to rid the unconscious captain of his firearms; one he passed to Serge, the other he retained. Then hurrying to the cabin door from which the woman's cry had sounded, and setting his shoulder to its solidity, he burst it open.

There was a man in the cabin with the girl who, still bound, cowered white-faced and appalled, on her settee, her eyes blazing with horror at the nearness of a red-hot iron. The man turned at sound of the opened door; his face writhed in a snarl. Seeing the intrusion he yelled madly and made as if to plunge the hot iron into the girl's face. Blackmore leaped on his shoulders and hurled him down.

A fine frenzy of madness possessed Blackmore, and had he been able to get his pistol clear he would have shot without an instant's hesitation, but the torn lining of the borrowed oilskin saved the torturer's life. The iron, flying from his hand, touched Blackmore's ear—not seriously, just enough to sting him into frantic action. About the battling two Serge hovered—no longer the aristocrat, only an avenging Russian. He tried to find an opening wherein to drive a bullet, but so closely were the two interlocked that to fire was to endanger one life equally with the other. At last Blackmore got his man by the throat and drove blow after blow into his face; he took him by the neck and hammered his head against the edge of the bunkboard, until the torturer grew as limp as a sweat-rag. Then Blackmore straightened himself, glowering, wiping the sweat from his brow, and said breathlessly:

"Time to cut the lady free, isn't it?"

They made short work of that. The girl said faintly that she was actually unharmed, though the fellow had threatened to burn out her eyes if she refused to dis-

The girl cowered, white-faced with horror at the nearness of a red-hot iron. The man turned; his face writhed in a snarl.

close the whereabouts of her cached possessions.

As she spoke Blackmore lifted the still hot iron and stood glowering at the insensible figure huddled on the deck, his eyes blazing. The sight of the girl's fear-distorted face had told him an astonishing thing—something the sight of Marianne Vandrennan had never told him, either in words or in heart-throbs. This sea-call to take once again the old trail meant more than the glint of moonlight on canvas—it had been a call to the inner soul of him.

FOR a moment he studied her—white and weak, with hunger-lines showing on her face, he thought, and the dull gleam of terror in her eyes.

"More work, yet," he said. "Let me take you out, madam." Without awaiting her reply he lifted her, feather-light, in his great arms, and bore her to another cabin. There, laying her down gently, he shut and locked the door on her.

"We've got to stay the course now," he told Serge; "they'll surely kill her, else."

"Yes, yes; we dare not fail now! What would you do?"

"Follow my lead; you'll see." He charged along to the pantry where he found a greasy steward cleaning knives. The fellow, recognizing them as strangers, threw a carving knife at him.

It was no time to stand on ceremony. Blackmore got his pistol free and drove a forty-five bullet through the man's right shoulder, crippling him. Then, swinging the pistol, he ran to the deck. The men were coming down from aloft, their work ill-done. The ship rioted gayly across the swinging whitecaps, and the song of wind aloft was like a chant of victory. One of the battered men came swinging aft—then halted abruptly at the poop-break, with a muzzle covering him.

"Come up—don't shout!" ordered Blackmore. The second mate advanced slowly, his face turning tallow-color where the bruises permitted. Blackmore reached and yanked him to the poop, crowding the pistol into his stomach.

"One cheep and you're dead meat, my friend!" he growled. "Where are we?" He could see no land; a sea-mist enveloped the boat.

"We sighta de Needleys li'l while back," stammered the second mate.

"Good enough," replied Blackmore brusquely. "Square the yards—stay here while you do it," he added. "Any dirty work and I blow a hole through you! Prince, you tell me if he says a word he shouldn't." The second mate, his teeth chattering, called the men, ordered the

boatswain to slack away to leeward. Dragging the officer with him, Blackmore went aft and tended the helm; the ship gathered speed and plunged northward as though eager to be free.

"Now tell them to get that boat clear for lowering," ordered Blackmore. He was obeyed to the letter.

When all was in order, Blackmore said: "Tell them to go below." He laughed as the men turned their backs. "Almost wish I'd taken them on, the whole pack," he chuckled. "Like old times, all this—good to me! Go and look after the lady, Prince; I can handle this job all right." When Serge returned with the report that his sister was sunk into heavy slumber, land was showing ahead.

"Question is, Prince, what do you want me to do?" Blackmore asked. "Shall we take the ship from them? That might result in complications. But I feel they owe you something for your mishandling."

"They also owe you something, sir."

"Me? Not a bit of it—only the happiest few hours I've spent for a long time! Say the word and we'll take the ship in and report the whole business to the police, demand compensation, and hold the ship until we get it. You were under British protection—we owe you compensation."

"So that we get free, it does not matter," demurred Serge.

"Have it your own way, then." Blackmore menaced the cringing second mate. "Heave to," he presently said, noting that the roughness of the water was abating. "If you're sailor enough to do it, which I doubt."

It was done, though in clumsy style. "Lower away that boat; get a ladder over for the lady!"

DETAIL by detail he was obeyed—Hardcase Blackmore, who got things done. The crew, soul-quelled, watched without understanding—they were examples of the lowest type of boat-hand.

Serge went below and returned with his sister, carrying her to the rail.

"Tell the men to assist them into the boat—see?" said Blackmore, his pistol muzzle bruising the second mate's ribs. The crew obeyed the order without demur; the whole affair was beyond their comprehension.

"Now, then—walk, *march!*" Blackmore thrust the second mate down to the maindeck and to the rail. Leisurely he climbed the rail, and from its eminence he said:

"There's nothing I'd like better than stay aboard and lick you scalawags into shape—the way you keep your ship is disgusting enough to sicken pigs! But you can go to the devil for all of me. Mister Second Mate, square away the minute the painter's cut. And remember—I'm a good shot still, though out of practice! Like this!" He snap-shot at a figure appearing on the poop—the captain, no less, brandishing a rifle. The rifle clattered to the deck, while the captain howled, his pierced wrist held to his mouth.

WITHOUT haste Blackmore descended the ladder, joining the two in the boat beneath. He cut the painter, and drifted astern. Once clear, he shipped the mast and hoisted sail. The sun was shining on the white cliffs ahead, and the water was calm and laughing. The boat was running sweetly before the good round wind.

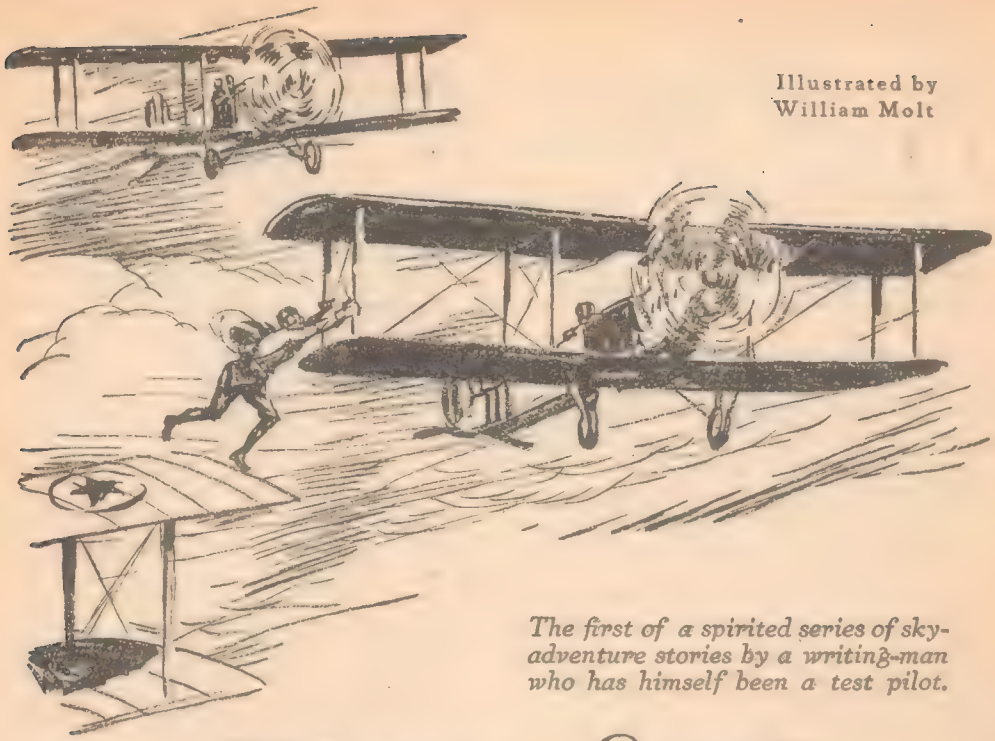
"They'll probably run her ashore before night," he said. "That'll be a pity. But you're safe—there's good weather ahead. I hope the lady's comfortable. Tell you what, Prince—since hotels and such don't seem safe, come and stay with me for a while at Grange Holt. That place is absolutely safe—and it needs a woman."

"We already owe you so much we could not put ourselves more deeply in your debt, sir," said Serge.

But his sister was smiling in assent.

"You owe me nothing; I owe you another good trip down the trail of rapture," protested Blackmore. "Come and welcome—there's a lot still to explain. It was lucky for us all I looked out of my window just when I did. No wonder I got that call—no wonder! That ship's my own ship—the *Carline,* that was. She called me out to help—she knew I wouldn't fail her. I wonder, Prince, if there'd be a chance of buying her back. She would make a yacht of sorts—when rid of the stockfish. She'd make a fine ship again—suitable for a honeymoon, say. We must think it out—meantime, come to Grange Holt and be safe."

He watched the ex-*Carline* diminish and disappear; then he turned his face on the two in the boat. Both were smiling—the girl most brightly. It entered Blackmore's consciousness that he had probably only just embarked on the most rapturous trail of all.



Illustrated by William Molt

The first of a spirited series of sky-adventure stories by a writing-man who has himself been a test pilot.

Picture Stuff

By RAOUL F. WHITFIELD

RUSS HEALY'S dislike for cameramen and cameras dated from those air-seconds, six months ago, during which he had fumbled for the rip-cord of his Irving seat-pack 'chute, while tumbling down from the wreckage of the De-Haviland he had been piloting. That D.H. had been airworthy until the pilot of the camera-ship had crashed her tail assembly, five thousand feet above the earth. With all the air in the sky he had banked into the D.H., just after his camera-man had shot Al Rodger's jump from a wing of Healy's ship. And right then the veteran had commenced to dislike camera-ship pilots. The fact that all of them had got down on 'chutes didn't make any difference. The fact that Russ hadn't been flying his pet Jenny, the "Old Lady," didn't help much. Russ was off the shoot stuff.

"No more for me!" he'd say. "The pilots these camera boys get to fly 'em are crazy. And the crank-boys are crazier. When I see a movie ship in the air—I nose down and land. Let 'em have the sky—that's me!"

The outfit just grinned. Russ Healy is a long, lanky veteran. Two thousand air hours, with a bit of every type of flying thrown in—he knows his stuff. There had been a time when he'd almost gone "film-flying" himself. But no more. When a fellow's 'chute opens only a hundred feet off the ground—he does some thinking.

Bob Brooks, boss of the Brooks' Flying Circus, humored Russ. He let him handle the jump-off ship, and the upper plane in the air-transfer stuff. But he kept him away when they were cranking something. That is, he did until we hit Bakersfield. Then things went bad. They go like that in a flying outfit. Quiet for a few months —and then everything pops the wrong way.

That was what happened at Bakersfield. Sid Lunn blew a front left tire in a forced landing, and when we pulled him out of the wreckage he had a busted leg. Charlie Ryan taxied into a couple of carelessly-deposited fuel cans and the plane nosed over. He came out with head cuts that would stop his flying for a week. And to top the three-day session off, Mel Duncan went up in a Lace Special, and

the engine cut out, went dead. It was a night flight, and Mel was too far from the field to glide in. He cut loose a flare which didn't light. So Mel stepped over the side and let the plane go. The 'chute let him down hard and gave him a nasty drag. They flivvered him into the Bakersfield hospital with a couple of broken ribs and a fractured left wrist.

ON the fourth day Russ and myself were sitting on a couple of empty oil cans and smoking pills. We were wondering who'd get it next, but we kept that guesswork to ourselves. It was a pretty quiet session until I happened to look up and spot Bob Brooks coming along with something decidedly nice.

"Hey!" I muttered. "Bob's wife is gettin' thin, Russ."

But it wasn't Bob's wife. It was a knickered lady with blonde hair and a pretty face. We saw that as they got up close; and we saw, also, that she carried a helmet and goggles in her left hand.

Russ groaned. "Here comes *more* trouble," he stated grimly. "Bob's had an idea."

They came up and we got off the oil cans. Brooks introduced the lady. Her name was Joan West, and she was better looking the closer you got to her, which isn't the usual thing. She gave us a smile that was one hundred per cent perfect. Bob started talking about the weather, about the latest flight across the Atlantic —about everything but what he wanted to tell us. Finally he got around to it.

"Miss West," he said cheerfully, "is going to work with us tomorrow."

I stiffened. Russ groaned. There was a little silence.

"That'll be great," I managed after a few seconds. "Fine."

RUSS managed something that was close to a smile. But he didn't say anything. Bob Brooks nodded his head.

"It ought to be good," he stated quietly. "Miss West is making a plane transfer—without the usual rope ladder. Wing to wing."

I regarded the girl with considerable admiration. There aren't many boys or girls doing it that way. A rope ladder dangling from the plane above means clearance. Either ship can hit a bump—drop or rise—and have air. But in order to go from plane to plane *without* a rope ladder, that means one wing tip must come within four or five feet of the other. It's a tough way of shifting ships.

Russ grunted. "First time you've done it that way, Miss West?" he asked grimly.

The girl laughed.

"It'll be the second," she said slowly. "I tried it one other time, but the ships—"

"Yeah—it'll be a good one," Bob cut in sort of loudly, and I figured right away that he was trying to cover something up. But so did Russ Healy.

"*What* happened the other time?" he asked.

The girl looked at Bob, then at me. She spoke in a cheerful tone.

"The ships got tangled up," she stated. "But the pilots weren't as expert, I'm sure, as you men."

I grinned. Bob Brooks grinned. Russ Healy nodded his head slowly.

"Maybe not," he agreed, but his tone wasn't exactly convincing.

"We'll work it this way—" Bob said slowly. "Mac, here—he'll fly Miss West up in a D.H. She'll do some wing work, and then you get off in the Old Lady, Russ. She'll work off the left wing. You get your right wing just over it. We'll rig on a wood loop-grip for her, and she'll swing off and climb up. A few more stunts on the upper surface—then you can come down."

"If not sooner," Russ muttered. "Well, you're the boss."

Bob nodded. "Now, the camera-ship'll be winging as close in as—"

Russ let out a roar. The girl looked startled. Bob stopped talking.

"Nothing doing!" Russ snapped grimly. "What do you mean, camera-ship?"

Bob spoke sharply. "I wouldn't ask you to do it, Russ—only we've got three pilots on the injured list and—"

"And you want a couple more fixed the same way!" Russ cut in. "Nothing doing!"

The girl laughed again. Only this time her laugh wasn't so pleasant.

"We'll all have 'chutes," she said icily. "I wouldn't worry, Mr. Healy."

Russ was getting sort of white around the lips. I could see that he was thinking back, remembering.

"Nothing doing!" he muttered for the third time. "If you keep the camera-ship out of the air, boss—"

"We're doing it *for* them!" Bob cut in. "The National News people want some-

thing snappy. We're in this business to make money—and this means we'll make some. You've got to fly the high plane, Russ."

I knew right away that Brooks had made a mistake. Russ' eyes and his words got cold.

"There's only one thing I've *got* to do," he stated grimly. "And I'll do that in a natural way if I don't fall for this picture stuff."

The girl had a derisive expression.

"Maybe it's just as well," she said slowly. "If that wreck over there is the one he was going to fly—I doubt if it could get enough altitude for me to pull the stunt!"

I held my breath. Russ Healy was rigid; his eyes narrowed to little slits. If a man had made that statement about the Old Lady, there would have been plenty of action.

The Old Lady was an ancient Jenny. She was battered and patched, oil-stained and weather-beaten. But Russ had worked over the old Hall-Scott engine. He'd redoped the wings and fuselage fabric again and again. He'd kept that Jenny in the air year after year—and he loved her. She'd let him down once or twice, but she'd always done it decently, given him a fair break. When any human slammed the Old Lady—

"Boss," Russ' voice was grim but steady, "I don't like picture stuff. You know that. But there's something else I don't like, too. I'll fly the Old Lady tomorrow!" He looked the girl squarely in the eyes.

"I'll let you climb up on one of the Old Lady's wings tomorrow," he said grimly. "And when you get aboard, and get through playing around on the wing—you just tuck yourself in the rear cockpit. Lady—wont we have fun!"

Then, abruptly, Russ turned his back on us and walked away. I stared at Bob, and he stared at me. Joan West shrugged her slender shoulders, and laughed. It was supposed to be sort of a gay laugh—but somehow it didn't seem to register that way. Bob spoke.

"He'll be all right by tomorrow, Miss West. Russ is all right. A camera-ship tangled with him six months ago—and he's off them. But he'll be all right. You stirred him up."

There was plenty of truth in that statement. The girl sure had stirred Russ up!

"But what did he mean? What will he do, after I make the transfer?"

Her voice trembled slightly. Brooks was trying to think of a good answer, and I couldn't help getting in a little dig.

"It'll be all right," I said slowly. "We'll all have 'chutes, wont we?"

THE girl wasn't around in the evening, and just before dark, when the air was pretty calm, Russ and I took a couple of ships up and played around a bit. Russ had the Old Lady and he had her within three feet of my left wing-tip several times. When we came down Bob grinned at us.

"It'll go fine!" he stated enthusiastically. "She could have reached up and made the transfer a half dozen times—just now."

Russ nodded. "Sure she could," he returned grimly. "But there wasn't any camera-ship in the air."

Bob eyed Russ narrowly. "Look here," he said slowly. "This little girl's all right, Russ. The camera people picked her for the stunt—she didn't pick them. I don't like the way you talked to her today."

Russ swore softly. "How about the way she talked to *me*?" he asked. "She thinks the Old Lady is an air wreck. And I aim to show her that—"

"Oh, that—you don't worry me any there," Bob cut in. "That lady has looped a ship sixty-two times in succession. She jumped twelve times. You can't scare her any. I'm not bothering about that any. But she's a lady and—"

"So's the Jenny!" Russ interrupted grimly. "She's no wreck, that plane. Lady West said she doubted if that Jenny could get altitude. Well, I hope she dresses warm tomorrow."

I stared at Russ. That was the bunk. The ceiling of the Old Lady wasn't so much that either Russ or the girl would be apt to catch even a mild cold, and he knew it. So did Bob Brooks. He shook his head slowly.

"It's a nice job, this transfer," he said slowly. "And we need the coin. Don't muss it up, either of you fellows."

"Give the same advice to the camera-ship pilot," Russ muttered. "He'll need it most."

Bob had started away, but he turned around, a grin on his face.

"Not *that* boy," he said quietly. "He's the guy who gave Miss West that little sparkler she's wearing on a certain finger."

I chuckled. Russ Healy groaned.

"Makes it worse yet!" he stated. "He'll be nervous when she starts to grab for the loop on the Old Lady's wing-tip. Well, maybe she'll get sick before tomorrow, or something."

I grinned. "That queers your game, Russ," I stated as Bob walked away. "If you pull anything funny, after the girl gets aboard the Old Lady—that camera-ship pilot will be waiting for you to come down."

Russ Healy's eyes were narrowed. He had a peculiar expression on his lean, browned face.

"Mac," he said slowly, "they can say things about me—but not about that Jenny. The Old Lady is all right. When they talk like that girl talked—I've got to show them they're wrong. Tomorrow—I'm showing her."

I didn't like his tone. It was a little too grim. "How?" I asked curiously.

But Russ just lighted another pill and glanced up toward the darkening sky.

"Maybe we'll get a break, Mac," he returned after a little silence. "*Maybe* the picture stuff will go all right. And if it does—well, you'll see how a certain clever little lady learns something about the Jenny."

"Remember, Russ,"—my voice was almost persuasive,—"she's a woman."

Russ sighed heavily. But when he spoke his tone was hard.

"Aint it the truth!" he stated.

IT was about ten minutes of four, and there was a pretty fair crowd on the field which we were using for the outfit. The Old Lady was on the deadline, and I had the DeHaviland that I was going to pilot alongside of her. The camera-ship had flown up from Los Angeles, and was a racily-lined two-seater. She was resting on the other side of the battered Jenny.

Bob Brooks came along the deadline with the girl on one side and a short, good-looking chap on the other. As they neared the three ships Bob gestured toward them. Russ was fooling around with his pack-'chute and watching the three at the same time. So was I.

The good-looking bird halted, stared at the battered Jenny. I could see that he was taking in her patches, the slight sag of her under-carriage, the lack of varnish on her struts. With the D.H. and the camera-ship for contrast, the Old Lady looked more of a wreck than ever.

Russ Healy gave his 'chute-pack a final pat, and moved toward the group. I tagged along. There was a broad grin on the short fellow's face as we came up.

"That the one you go up to, Joan?" he asked, and she nodded her head.

He groaned loudly. "When you get inside don't snap the safety belt," he advised in a grim tone. "It'll be easier for you to go over the side when she starts to break up under the added weight of your one hundred and fifteen pounds."

The girl laughed. It was a musical laugh, but I could see it didn't sound that way to Russ Healy. He glared at the good-looking chap.

"Meet Steve Lott, Russ." It was Bob Brooks who spoke. "He's piloting the shoot-ship."

Russ nodded. But he didn't raise his right hand from his side. Lott kept right on grinning.

"If we're all set—let's go up and get it over with," Russ said slowly. "I don't like the job, anyway."

Lott grunted. "Shouldn't think you would," he agreed. "Not flying that piece of junk!"

I grabbed Russ by the right arm, and hung on. But the funny part of it was that he just sort of smiled. He stared at Lott, and then at the girl. When he spoke his words were addressed to her.

"I'm kind of sorry for you," he said slowly. "You might have picked out a *real* man."

Lott glared at Russ, and Bob Brooks started to talk fast and give final instructions. He wanted the stuff pulled at four thousand, so that the camera would get some of the earth detail in. And he wanted every one to take their time.

I saw that the girl was watching Russ a lot, and I felt kind of sorry for her. It looked to me as if she were a little scared. So just before she climbed into the rear cockpit of my D.H., I said a few words to her.

"Don't let Russ bother you," I told her. "He was just talking yesterday. And he's a flying fool."

She stiffened. Her chin came up a bit.

"I'm not afraid of him," she stated in a hard tone. "It's the wreck he's flying that worries me."

I started to tell her that the Old Lady was all right, and just then Russ started

to rev her up. She had a roar like two ordinary planes, and there wasn't much use getting hoarse yelling at Miss West. Anyway, it was ten to one that she wouldn't be convinced.

She had her pack-'chute on, and adjusted her helmet. She wore no goggles. As she climbed into the rear cockpit of the DeHaviland, the camera-plane took off. I revved up the D.H.'s engine, and Russ taxied the Old Lady out. He waved a hand, and I waved back.

The camera-ship and the Old Lady were above me —too close for comfort. The girl was out of sight.

I jerked my head. Miss West had an expression of intense dislike on her fair face; it was directed toward the taxiing Jenny. I smiled grimly, muttered a sort of half-prayer—and advanced the throttle a few notches. The D.H. rolled out, and I gave her left rudder to get her nosed into the wind. Then I opened her up—and took off. . . . .

We were at four thousand—the three planes. I had the D.H. throttled down a bit, flying into the wind. We were approaching an airspot almost directly over the circus outfit's field. The camera-plane was off to the right, but not very far off. It had about twenty-five feet more altitude, and I could see the head and shoulders of the man who was making the shoot. He was standing in the rear cockpit, and his camera was mounted on a movable bracket.

I jerked my head, banked a bit—then straightened the D.H. out. The Old Lady was coming up from behind. Russ Healy had her within a half mile of the D.H. I twisted around, nodded my head to the girl.

"All right!" I snapped. "Let's go!"

She understood, of course, though it was doubtful if she heard my words above the roar of the engine's exhausts. The next thing I knew, she was working her way out along the lower wing surface. She moved along as if she were going somewhere—and without the slightest false effort. I grinned. The weaker sex? It was almost funny—that line!

The wind zipped her tight-fitting blouse

close about her. She grasped first one strut, then the next. Out near the edge of the wing-tip, she suddenly threw back her head and laughed, waving a hand. I grinned back at her. As she reached up toward the loop on the upper surface I thought my ears picked up the blending of another engine roar with mine. Then the girl was swinging up—had vanished from sight.

I glanced to the right, saw that the camera man in the rear cockpit of the third plane had started to crank. The D.H. was handling nicely; there was pretty fair air at four thousand.

My job was to keep the D.H. on even keel while the girl did her stuff on the upper wing, and it wasn't such a tough job. From time to time I glanced at the camera-man, cranking away. I could see Lott's helmeted head. The pilot of the third ship had her in pretty close; I guessed that Russ Healy was almost above me now—with the Old Lady.

Then, glancing to the left, I saw the battered Jenny. Russ waved a hand; the ship banked back over the D.H. I kept the nose of the plane lined up on the horizon, corrected for even the slightest bump with the ailerons. We were just passing over the outfit's field—when it happened.

I felt the D.H. jerk madly around—to the right! There was a ripping, tearing sound. The joy-stick was twisted from my grip. The right wing surface warped before my eyes!

AS I cut the throttle I realized what had happened. A wing of Healy's ship had tangled with mine. And the D.H. was finished—I knew that in one flashing second. And I knew, as my hands fumbled with the safety-belt, that the ships had freed themselves again.

I tried to hold the nose of the D.H. up—it wouldn't come up. As we went slowly into the first turns of a spin—a plane flashed downward, off to the right. No—*two* planes!

The Old Lady was going down tangled with the camera-plane! There had been a triple crash!

And even as I saw the two ships going down, in a slow spin and almost flatly—my eyes picked up the form of the girl. She was lying flat on the upper surface of the Old Lady's right wing. Lying motionlessly! She had made the transfer—and then had come the triple crash.

I STOOD up in the cockpit, swung a leg over the side to the left, lower wing. We were spinning to the right, and I wanted to get clear on the outside. My right hand gripped the stick, trying to keep the D.H. from going into a tight spin, while my left groped for the dangling ring of the 'chute rip-cord.

It found it, and I hooked a finger through the ring. Then I let go of the stick, got my other leg out of the cockpit—let myself be wind-battered away from the ship.

I counted five—jerked the ring. There was the crackling sound of the pilot-'chute, as it snapped open—and almost immediately the greater crackling of the bigger spread of silk. The harness tightened about my body. My head was jerked upward. Then I was drifting, shaking off the effects of that plunge—and staring beyond the falling arc of my wing-warped plane.

The camera-ship and the Old Lady were above me. My drop had been faster than their slow-spinning fall. And they were close—too close for comfort. I could see things clearly. The girl was out of sight; I couldn't see above the upper wings of the Jenny. Even as I stared, two objects shot downward from the camera-ship. Lott and the camera-man were getting clear!

Their 'chutes functioned perfectly. They drifted down, within twenty feet of each other. I stared at the crashed, tangled planes. Why hadn't the girl jumped? And what was the matter with Russ Healy?

It hadn't been a wide-open crash. And I couldn't tell whose fault it had been. But I could guess—the nose of the camera-ship seemed jammed into the rear cockpit of the Jenny; her left wing slanted up over the tail-assembly of the Old Lady. It looked as if the camera-ship had banked to the left—and crashed the Jenny.

"Get clear!" I muttered hoarsely. "Get clear—you two!"

The tangled planes were spinning faster now. They were dropping below my drift-level, within fifty yards of me. I got a glimpse of Russ Healy's head. It moved. He wasn't out. I screamed at him.

"Get clear, Russ!"

The two ships were nosing down now, not dropping flatly. I could hear the wire scream. The prop of the camera-plane

was splintered—but the Old Lady's seemed to be turning, throttled down to a low-revolution speed.

Then, with the ships below me, I saw the girl again. As I stared at her form, lying across the wing surface, I saw that her left arm was hooked through the loop placed there for stunting purposes. And I saw her move, raise her head slightly.

THERE was a crash—my D.H. had dug in. I looked down, saw the ship burst into flames. The field was less than a thousand feet below, the clipped grass seemed to be rising up at a tremendous speed. I stared down, kicking around in the 'chute harness, at the tangled ships again.

And I saw why the girl hadn't jumped. Dangling from her back, hanging over the trailing edge of the upper wing surface, was her 'chute pack. Even as I watched her right hand groped toward the harness, tried to find that rip-cord ring.

"Too late now!" I groaned. "Less than eight hundred feet—"

And then, suddenly, it happened. Once before I'd seen the same thing happen. And that had been in France. There was a jerking of the two ships—they drifted apart! The spin had flung them apart!

The camera-plane went instantly into a side-slip. I kicked around furiously, tried to watch the Old Lady. She nosed down, her left wing dropping under the weight of the girl. Then her nose came up, just as I thought she was going into a final spin—her left wing came up, too. I heard the roar of her exhausts. The Old Lady was trying to fly—was trying to fly out of it!

There was a second crash as the camera-plane struck the field. I flexed my legs—seventeen feet a second was my drop-speed. The force of a ten-foot drop would be my landing jolt. The earth came up—I struck heavily, rolled over once, crawled out from beneath the collapsing silk spread.

It took me ten seconds to get out from the harness. And as I freed myself—the Old Lady came in!

She was headed into the wind. Her fuselage, near the rear cockpit, was battered. The fabric was in shreds. But she was flying. And as her exhaust roar died, and her wheels and tail-skid touched the clipped grass, I raised my eyes. Still clinging to the wood loop, on the upper surface of the right wing, was the girl. The Old Lady had brought her down!

WE were grouped around Miss West. She was pale, and she spoke in a voice that was slightly shaken. But she spoke bravely. She was that kind.

"The crash came just as I lifted myself up over the wing surface of the Jenny. It nearly knocked me loose—twisted me around. I hung on, though—pulled myself up. But I ripped the 'chute pack loose from part of its harness. I wanted to get clear—couldn't find the rip-ring. So I lay there—and waited. You know the rest."

Bob Brooks nodded his head. Steve Lott said excitedly:

"Lord, it was close! I wanted to get in, get a perfect shot for the camera. We hit a bump—and I tried to zoom. But we crashed before she nosed up. All three ships got it. We'll stand the loss, of course—but—"

He stopped. He was too shaken to go on. The girl's eyes were on Russ Healy, who was frowning.

"I'm sorry!" she said simply. "No use saying what I think—you *know*. Man—that battered crate is—" She stopped, groped for a word, found it—"wonderful! Can she fly? I'm here—to tell you *she can!*"

RUSS smiled, but he didn't say much. Later, while he was patching up the fuselage of the Old Lady, I caught him alone. It had been a tight jam for all of us. Two planes gone—and three of us using 'chutes. No pictures, of course. All smashed—all that had been taken. But if it hadn't been for Russ—and the Old Lady— Well, Joan West wouldn't laugh *that* way again, at a battered plane.

I told Russ that, and then I asked a question. It had been worrying me a bit.

"Supposing things had gone right, Russ—what were you figuring on doing with the girl? How were you going to prove—"

Russ Healy grinned. "Mac," he said slowly, "I wasn't going to do a thing. What in hell *could* I do? That kid had nerve."

I chuckled. Russ Healy throwing a bluff! It was almost funny.

"She had nerve," he repeated grimly, "and believe me, Mac, that's what you've got to have—when it comes to picture stuff!"

TARZAN,

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

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 hunter had 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, and was about to be murdered by the Sheik's brother Tollog, 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 permission 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 cu-

There was a smile upon the lips of the ape-man as he swung through the forest.

Lord of the Jungle

The most captivating romance of our times comes in this installment to its most interesting episodes.

rious 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 the English of the Crusades.

For seven hundred years, he learned, the descendants of four wandering shipwrecked companies of English crusaders had maintained themselves in this hidden valley, believing themselves ringed about by the Saracens. They had kept up their ancient manners, customs and speech. And they received Blake as a fellow-countryman, though his speech and allusions were indeed strange to them. They even instructed him in the use of their medieval arms so well that Blake, upon the advice of his special friend the noble young Sir Richard Montmorency, accepted a challenge from Sir Malud, a knight who was jealous of the favor shown Blake by the Princess Guinalda.

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. Afterward Tarzan made his way to Ibn Jad's camp. And the Sheik compelled Stimbol to attempt Tarzan's murder as the ape-man lay asleep in one of the tents. *(The story continues in detail:)*

CHAPTER XIV

Sword and Buckler

AS the sun touched the turrets of the castle of the Prince of Nímmr a youth rolled from between his blankets, rubbed his eyes and stretched. Then he reached over and shook another youth of about his own age who slept beside him.

"Awaken, Edward! Awaken, thou sluggard!" he cried.

Edward rolled over on his back and essayed to say "Eh?" but only yawned.

"Up, lad!" urged Michel. "Forgettest thou that thy master fares forth to be slain this day?"

Edward sat up, now fully awake. His eyes flashed. "'Tis a lie!" he cried loyally. "He will cleave Sir Malud from poll to breastplate with a single blow. Lives no sir knight with such mighty thews as Sir James. Thou art disloyal, Michel, to Sir Richard's friend, who hath been a kindly friend to us as well."

Michel patted the other lad upon the shoulder. "Nay, I did but jest, Edward," he said. "My hopes be all for Sir James; and yet,"—he paused—"I fear—"

"Fear what?" demanded Edward.

"That Sir James is not well enough versed in the use of sword and buckler to overcome Sir Malud, for even were his strength the strength of ten men, it will avail him naught without the skill to use it."

"Thou shalt see!" maintained Edward, stoutly.

"I see that Sir James hath a loyal squire," said a voice behind them; and turning, they saw Sir Richard standing in the doorway. "May all his friends wish him well this day thus loyally!"

"I fell asleep last night praying to our Lord to guide his blade through Sir Malud's helm," said Edward.

"Good! And get thee up now and look to thy master's mail and to the trappings of his steed, that he may enter the lists bedight as befits a noble sir knight of Nímmr," instructed Richard, and left them.

IT was eleven o'clock of this February morning. The sun shone down into the great north ballium of the castle of Nímmr, glinting from the polished mail of noble knights and from pike and battleax of men-at-arms, picking out the gay colors of the robes of the women gathered in the grandstand below the inner wall.

Upon a raised dais at the front and center of the spectators sat Prince Gobred and his party and upon either side of them, and extending to the far ends of the stand were ranged the noble knights and ladies of Nímmr; behind them sat men-at-arms who were off duty, then the freedmen and, last of all, the serfs; for under the beneficent rule of the house of Gobred these were accorded many privileges.

At either end of the lists was a tent, gay with pennons and the colors and devices of its owner—one with the green and gold of Sir Malud, and the other with the blue and silver of Sir James.

Before each of these stood two men-at-arms, resplendent in new apparel, with the metal of their battleaxes gleaming brightly; and here a groom held a restive, richly caparisoned charger, while the squire of each of the contestants busied himself with last-minute preparations for the encounter.

A trumpeter, statuesque, the bell of his trumpet resting upon his hip, waited for the signal to sound the fanfare that would announce the entrance of his master into the lists.

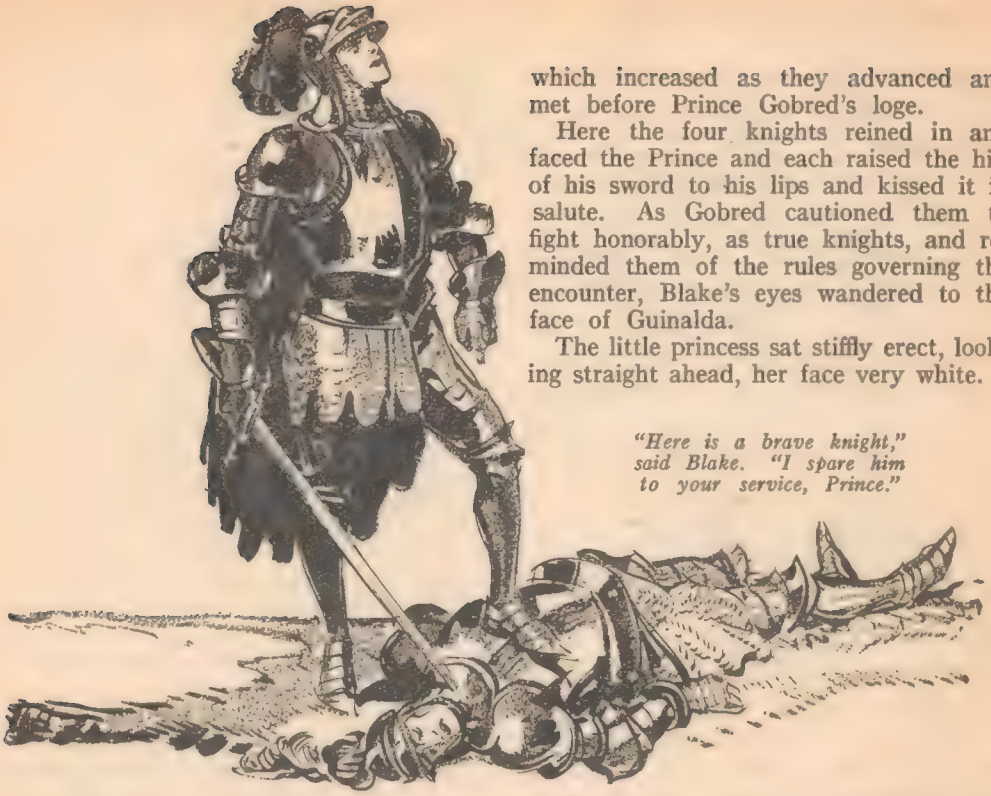
A few yards to the rear a second charger champed upon his bit as he nuzzled the groom that held him in waiting for the knight who would accompany each of the contestants upon the field.

In the blue and silver tent sat Blake and Sir Richard, the latter issuing instructions and advice; and of the two he was the more nervous. Blake's hauberk, gorget and bassinet were of heavy chain mail, the latter lined inside and covered outside, down to the gorget, with leopard skin, offering fair protection for his head from an ordinary, glancing blow; upon his breast was sewn a large red cross, and from the shoulder depended the streamers of a blue and silver rosette. Hanging from the pole of the tilt, upon a wooden peg, were Blake's sword and buckler.

The grandstand was filled. Prince Gobred glanced up at the sun and spoke to a knight at his side. The latter gave a brief command to a trumpeter stationed at the princely loge, and presently, loud and clear, the notes of a trumpet rang in the ballium. Instantly the tents at either end of the lists were galvanized to activity, while the grandstand seemed to spring to new life as necks were craned first toward the tent of Sir Malud and then toward that of Sir James.

EDWARD, flushed with excitement, ran into the tent and seizing Blake's sword, passed the girdle about his hips and buckled it in place at his left side; then, with the buckler, he followed his master out of the tent.

As Blake prepared to mount, Edward held his stirrup while the groom sought



"Here is a brave knight," said Blake. "I spare him to your service, Prince."

to quiet the nervous horse. The lad pressed Blake's leg after he had swung into the saddle (no light accomplishment, weighed down as he was by heavy chain mail) and looked up into his face.

"I have prayed for thee, Sir James," he said. "I know that thou wilt prevail."

Blake saw tears in the youth's eyes as he looked down at him, and he caught a choking note in his voice. "You're a good boy, Eddie," he said. "I'll promise that you wont have to be ashamed of me."

"Ah, Sir James, how could I? Even in death thou wilt be a noble figure of a knight. An fairer one it hath never been given one to see, methinks," Edward assured him as he handed him his round buckler.

Sir Richard had mounted by now, and at a signal from him that they were ready, there was a fanfare from the trumpet at Sir Malud's tent, and that noble sir knight rode forward, followed by a single knight.

Blake's trumpeter now announced his master's entry, and the American rode out close along the front of the spectators, followed by Sir Richard. There was a murmur of applause for each contestant, which increased as they advanced and met before Prince Gobred's loge.

Here the four knights reined in and faced the Prince and each raised the hilt of his sword to his lips and kissed it in salute. As Gobred cautioned them to fight honorably, as true knights, and reminded them of the rules governing the encounter, Blake's eyes wandered to the face of Guinalda.

The little princess sat stiffly erect, looking straight ahead, her face very white.

How beautiful she was, he thought, and though she did not once appear to look at him, he was not cast down, for neither did she look at Malud.

Again the trumpet sounded, and the four knights rode slowly back to opposite ends of the lists, where the principals waited for the final signal to engage. Blake disengaged his arm from the leather loop of his buckler and tossed the shield upon the ground.

Edward looked at him aghast. "My lord knight!" he cried. "Art ill? Art fainting? Didst drop thy buckler?" And he snatched it up and held it aloft to Blake, though he knew full well that his eyes had not deceived him, and that his master had cast aside his only protection.

To the horrified Edward there seemed but one explanation and that his loyalty would not permit him to entertain for an instant—that Blake was preparing to dismount and refuse to meet Sir Malud, giving the latter the victory by default and assuring himself of the contempt and ridicule of all Nimmr.

He ran to Richard, who had not seen Blake's act. "Sir Richard! Sir Richard!" he cried in a hoarse whisper. "Some terrible affliction, surely, hath befallen Sir James!"

"Hey, what?" exclaimed Sir Richard. "What meanest thou, lad?"

"He has cast aside his buckler," cried the youth. "He must be stricken sore ill, for it cannot be that otherwise he would refuse combat."

Richard spurred to Blake's side. "Hast gone mad, man?" he demanded. "Thou canst not refuse the encounter now, unless thou wouldst bring dishonor upon thy friends!"

"Where did you get that line?" demanded Blake. "Who said I was going to quit?"

"But thy buckler?" cried Sir Richard.

The trumpet at the Prince's loge rang out peremptorily. Sir Malud spurred forward to a fanfare from his own trumpeter.

"Let her go!" cried Blake to his.

"Thy buckler!" screamed Sir Richard.

"The damned thing was in my way," shouted Blake as he spurred forward to meet the doughty Malud, Richard trailing behind him, as did Malud's second behind that knight.

There was a confident smile upon the lips of Sir Malud, and he glanced often at the knights and ladies who were waiting, but Blake rode with his eyes always upon his antagonist.

Both horses had broken immediately into a gallop, and as they neared one another Malud spurred forward at a run, and Blake saw that the man's aim was doubtless to overthrow him at the first impact, or at least to so throw him out of balance as to make it easy for Malud to strike a good blow before he could recover himself.

Malud rode with his sword half raised at his right side, while Blake's was at guard, a position unknown to the knights of Nimmr, who guarded solely with their bucklers.

The horsemen approached to engage upon each other's left, and as they were about to meet, Sir Malud rose in his stirrups and swung his sword hand down, to gain momentum, described a circle with his blade and launched a terrific cut at Blake's head.

It was at that instant that some few in the grandstand realized that Blake bore no buckler.

"His buckler! Sir James hath no buckler! He hath lost his buckler!" rose now from all parts of the stand; and from right beside him, where the two knights met before the loge of Gobred, Blake heard a woman scream, but he could not look to see if it were Guinalda.

AS they met, Blake reined his horse suddenly toward Malud's, so that the two chargers' shoulders struck, and at the same time he cast all his weight in the same direction, whereas Malud, who was standing in his stirrups to deliver his blow, and having his buckler ready for defense, was quite helpless in so far as maneuvering his mount was concerned.

Malud, overbalanced, lost the force and changed the direction of his blow, which fell, much to the knight's surprise, upon Blake's blade, along which it spent its force and was deflected from its target.

Instantly, his horse well in hand by reason that his left arm was unincumbered by a buckler, Blake reined in and simultaneously cut to the left and rear, his point opening the mail on Malud's left shoulder and biting into the flesh before the latter's horse had carried him out of reach.

A loud shout of approbation rose from the stands, for the thing had been neatly done and then Malud's second spurred to the Prince's loge and entered protest.

"Sir James hath no buckler!" he cried. "'Tis no fair combat!"

"'Tis fairer for thy knight than for Sir James," said Gobred.

"We would not take that advantage of him," parried Malud's second, Sir Jarred.

"What sayest thou?" demanded Gobred of Sir Richard, who had quickly ridden to Jarred's side. "Is Sir James without a buckler through some accident that befell before he entered the lists?"

"Nay, he cast it aside," replied Richard, "and averred that the 'damned thing' did annoy him; but if Sir Jarred feeleth that, because of this, they be not fairly matched, we are willing that Sir Malud also should cast aside his buckler."

Gobred smiled. "That is fair," he said.

THE two men, concerned with their encounter and not with the argument of their seconds, had engaged once more. Blood was showing upon Malud's shoulder and trickling down his back, staining saddle-skirts and the housing of his charger.

The stand was in an uproar, for many were still shouting aloud about the buckler, and others were screaming with delight over the neat manner in which Sir

"Prince Gobred," Blake called the length of the room, "knights and ladies of Nimmr, I give you a toast to Sir Malud!"

James had drawn first blood. Wagers were being freely made, and though Sir Malud still ruled favorite in the betting, the odds against Blake were not so great, and while men had no money to wager, they had jewels and arms and horses. One enthusiastic adherent of Sir Malud bet three chargers against one that his champion would be victorious, and the words were scarce out of his mouth ere he had a dozen takers; whereas before the opening passage at arms offers as high as ten to one had found no takers.

Now the smile was gone from Malud's lips and he glanced no more at the spectators. There was rage in his eyes as he spurred again toward Blake, who he thought had profited by a lucky accident.

Unhampered by a buckler, Blake took full advantage of the nimbleness of the wiry horse he rode, and which he had ridden daily since his arrival in Nimmr, so that man and beast were well accustomed to one another.

Again Sir Malud saw his blade glance harmlessly from the sword of his antagonist, and then, to his vast surprise, the point of Sir James' blade leaped quickly beneath his buckler and entered his side. It was not a deep wound, but it was painful and again it brought blood.

Angrily Malud struck again, but Blake had reined his charger quickly to the rear, and before Malud could gather his reins, Blake had struck him again, this time a heavy blow upon the helmet.

Half stunned and wholly infuriated, Malud wheeled and charged at full tilt, determined to ride his adversary down. They met with a crash directly in front of Gobred's loge; there was a quick play of swords that baffled the eyesight of the onlookers; and then, to the astonishment of all, most particularly Malud, that noble sir knight's sword flew from his grasp and hurtled to the field, leaving him entirely to the mercy of his foe.

Malud reined in and sat erect, waiting. He knew, and Blake knew, that under the rules governing their encounter Blake was warranted in running him through unless Malud sued for mercy; and no one, Blake least of all, expected this of so proud and haughty a knight.

Sir Malud sat proudly on his charger waiting for Blake to advance and kill him. Utter silence had fallen upon the stands, so that the champing of Malud's horse upon its bit was plainly audible. Blake turned to Sir Jarred.

"Summon a squire, sir knight," he said, "to return Sir Malud's sword to him."

Again the stands rocked to the applause, but Blake turned his back upon them and rode to Richard's side, to

wait there until his adversary was again armed.

"Well, old top," he inquired of Sir Richard, "just how much a dozen am I offered for bucklers now?"

Richard laughed. "Thou hast been passing fortunate, James," he replied; "but methinks a good swordsman would long since have cut thee through."

"I know Malud would have if I had packed that chopping-bowl along on the party," Blake assured him, though it is doubtful if Sir Richard understood what he was talking about, as was so often the case when Blake discoursed.

But now Sir Malud was rearmed and riding toward Blake. He stopped his horse before the American and bowed low. "I do my devoirs to a noble and generous knight," he said graciously.

Blake bowed. "Are you ready, sir?" he asked. Malud nodded.

"On guard, then!" snapped Blake.

For a moment the two jockeyed for position. Blake feinted and Malud raised his buckler before his face to catch the blow, but as it did not fall, he lowered his shield, just as Blake had known that he would; and as he did so, the edge of the American's weapon fell heavily upon the crown of his bassinet.

Malud's arms dropped at his side; he slumped in his saddle and then toppled forward and rolled to the ground. Agile, even in his heavy armor, Blake dismounted and walked to where his foe lay stretched upon his back almost in front of Gobred's loge. He placed a foot upon Malud's breast and pressed the point of his sword against his throat.

The crowd leaned forward to see the *coup de grace* administered, but Blake did not drive his point home. He looked up at Prince Gobred and addressed him.

"Here is a brave knight," he said, "with whom I have no real quarrel. I spare him to your service, Prince, and to those who love him." And his eyes went straight to the eyes of the Princess Guinalda. Then he turned and walked back to his own tent, while Richard rode behind him, and the knights and the ladies, and men-at-arms, the freedmen and the serfs shouted their applause.

Indeed, Edward was beside himself with joy, as was Michel. The former knelt and embraced Blake's legs. He kissed his hand, and wept, so great was his happiness and his excitement.

"I knew it! I knew it!" he cried. "Did I not tell thee, Michel, that my own sir knight would overthrow Sir Malud?"

The men-at-arms, the trumpeter and the grooms at Blake's tilt wore grins that stretched from ear to ear. Whereas a few minutes before they had felt ashamed to have been detailed to the losing side, now they were most proud and looked upon Blake as the greatest hero of Nimmr. Great would be their boasting among their fellows as they gathered with their flagons of ale about the rough deal table in their dining-hall.

Edward removed Blake's armor and Michel got Richard out of his, amidst much babbling upon the part of the youths.

Blake went directly to his quarters, and Richard accompanied him; and when the two men were alone, Richard placed a hand upon Blake's shoulder.

"Thou hast done a noble and chivalrous thing, my friend," he said, "but I know not that it be a wise one."

"And why?" demanded Blake. "You didn't think I could stick the poor mutt when he was lying there defenseless?"

Richard shook his head. "'Tis but what he would have done for thee had thy positions been reversed," said he.

"Well, I couldn't do it. We're not taught to believe that it is exactly ethical to hit a fellow when he's down, where I come from," explained Blake.

"Had your quarrel been no deeper than appeared upon the surface, thou mightst well have been thus magnanimous; but Malud is jealous of thee, and that jealousy will be by no means lessened by what hath transpired this day. Thou mightst have been rid of a powerful and dangerous enemy hadst thou given him the *coup de grace*, as was thy right; but now thou hast raised up a greater enemy, since to his jealousy is added hatred and envy against thee for thy prowess over him. Thou didst make him appear like a monkey, James, and that Sir Malud wilt never forgive, an' I know the man."

THE knights and ladies attached to the castle of Gobred ate together at a great table in the huge hall of the castle. Three hundred people could be accommodated at the single board, and it took quite a company of serving-men to fill their needs. Whole pigs, roasted, were

carried in upon great trenchers, and there were legs of mutton and sides of venison and bowls of vegetables, with wine and ale, and at the end immense puddings.

There was much laughter and loud talking, and it all presented a wild and fascinating picture to Sir James Blake as he sat at the lower end of the table far below the salt that night, in his accustomed place as one of the latest neophytes in the noble ranks of the knighthood.

The encounter between himself and Malud was the subject of the moment, and many were the compliments bestowed upon him, and many the questions as to where and how he had acquired his strange technique of swordsmanship. Although they had seen him accomplish it, they still appeared to believe it inconceivable that a man might prevail without a buckler over one who carried this essential article of defense.

Prince Gobred and his family sat, with the higher nobles of Nímmr, at a table slightly raised above the rest of the board and running across its upper end, the whole forming a huge T. When he wished to speak to anyone farther down the table, he resorted to the simple expedient of raising his voice, so that if several were so inclined at the same time the room became a bedlam for uproar and confusion.

And as Blake sat at the farthest end of the table, it was necessary for one at Gobred's end to scream to attract attention, though when it was discovered that it was the Prince who was speaking the rest of the company lapsed into silence out of respect for him.

SHORTLY after the feasters were seated, Gobred had arisen and lifted his goblet high in air, and silence had fallen upon the whole company as knights and ladies rose and faced their prince.

"Hál to our King!" cried Gobred. "Hál to our liege lord, Richard of England!"

And in a great chorus rose the answering "Hál!" as the company drank the health of Richard Cœur de Lion seven hundred and twenty-eight years after his death!

Then they drank the health of Gobred and of the Princess Brynilda, his wife, and of the Princess Guinalda; and each time a voice boomed from just below the dais of the Prince: "Here I be looking at thee!" as Sir Richard with a proud smile displayed his newly acquired knowledge.

Again Prince Gobred rose. "Hál," he cried, "to that worthy sir knight who hath most nobly and chivalrously acquitted himself in the lists this day! Hál to Sir James, Knight Templar and now Knight of Nímmr!"

Not even the name of Richard I. of England had aroused the enthusiasm that followed the drinking to Sir James. The length of the long hall Blake's eyes traveled straight to where Guinalda stood. He saw her drink to him, and he saw that her eyes were regarding him but the distance was too great and the light of the pitch torches and the oil cressets too dim for him to see whether her glance carried a message of friendship or dislike.

When the noise had partially subsided and the drinkers had retaken their seats, Blake arose.

"Prince Gobred," he called the length of the room, "knights and ladies of Nímmr, I give you another toast! To Sir Malud!"

For a moment there was silence, the silence of surprise, and then the company arose and drank the health of the absent Sir Malud.

"Thou art a strange sir knight, with strange words upon thy lips and strange ways, Sir James," shouted Gobred, "but though thou callest a hál a toast and thy friends be 'old top' and 'kid,' yet withal it seemeth that we understand thee and we would know more about thy country and the ways of the noble knights that do abide there. Tell us, are they all thus chivalrous and magnanimous to their fallen foes?"

"If they're not, they get the raspberry," explained Blake.

"'Get the raspberry'!" repeated Gobred. "'Tis some form of punishment, methinks."

"You said it, Prince!"

"Of a surety I said it, Sir James!" snapped Gobred with asperity.

"I mean, Prince, that you hit the nail on the head—you guessed it the first time. You see, the raspberry is about the only form of punishment that the Knights of the Squared Circle, or the Knights of the Diamond can understand."

"'Knights of the Squared Circle'! 'Knights of the Diamond'! Those be knightly orders of which I wot not. Be they doughty knights?"

"Some of them are dotty, but a lot of them are regulars. Take Sir Dempsey, for instance. There's a heavyweight champion knight of the Squared Circle. He has been defeated by Sir Tunney; but take it from me, Prince, he was a wonder in his day!"

"Be there other orders of knighthood these days?" demanded Gobred.

"We're lousy with them!"

"What?" cried Gobred.

"We're all knights these days," explained Blake.

"All knights! Be there no serfs nor yeomen? 'Tis incredible!"

"Well, there are some yeomen in the navy, I think; but all the rest of us, pretty much, are knights. You see things have changed a lot since the days of Richard. The people have sort of overthrown the old order of things. They poked a lot of ridicule at knights and wanted to get rid of knighthood and as soon as they had they all wanted to be knights themselves, so we have Knights Templars now and Knights of Pythias and Knights of Columbus and Knights of Labor and a lot more I can't recall."

"Methinks it must be a fine and a noble world," cried Gobred, "for what with so many noble sir knights it would seem that they must often contend, one against another—is that not true?"

"Well, they do scrap some," Blake admitted, suppressing a grin.

CHAPTER XV

The Lonely Grave

WITHIN the dark interior of the *beyt,* Stimbol could see nothing. Just before him he heard a man breathing heavily as might one in a troubled sleep. The would-be murderer paused to steady his nerves, for he was trembling like a leaf. Then, on hands and knees, he crept forward inch by inch.

Presently one of his hands touched the prostrate figure of the sleeper. Lightly, cautiously, Stimbol groped until he had definitely discovered the position in which his victim lay. In one hand, ready, he grasped the keen knife. He scarce dared breathe for fear he might awaken the apeman. He hoped that Tarzan was a sound sleeper and he prayed that the first blow of his weapon would reach that savage heart.

Now he was ready! He had located the exact spot where he must strike! He raised his knife and struck. His victim shuddered spasmodically. Again and again with savage, maniacal force and speed the knife was plunged into the soft flesh. Stimbol felt the warm blood spurt out upon his hand and wrist.

At length, satisfied that his mission had been accomplished, he scurried from the *beyt.* Now he was trembling so that he could scarcely stand—terrified, revolted by the horrid crime he had committed.

Wild-eyed, haggard, he stumbled to the *mukaad* of Ibn Jad's *beyt,* and there he collapsed. The sheik stepped from the women's quarters and looked down upon the trembling figure that the dim light of a paper lantern revealed.

"What doest thou here, Nasrâny?" he demanded.

"I have done it, Ibn Jad!" muttered Stimbol.

"Done what?" cried the sheik.

"Slain Tarzan of the Apes."

"Ai! Ai!" screamed Ibn Jad. "Tollog! Where art thou? Hirfa! Ateja! Come! Didst hear what the Nasrâny sayeth?"

Hirfa and Ateja rushed into the *mukaad.*

"Didst hear him?" repeated Ibn Jad. "He hath slain my good friend the great sheik of the jungle. Motlog! Fahd! Haste!" His voice had been rising until now he was screaming at the top of his lungs and 'Aarab were streaming toward his *beyt* from all directions.

Stimbol, stunned by what he had done, dumb from surprise and terror at the unexpected attitude of Ibn Jad, crouched speechless in the center of the *mukaad.*

"Seize him!" cried the sheik to the first men that arrived. "He hath slain Tarzan of the Apes, our great friend, who was to preserve us and lead us from this land of dangers. Now all will be our enemies. The friends of Tarzan will fall upon us and slay us. Allah, bear witness that I be free from guilt in this matter and let thy wrath and that of the friends of Tarzan fall upon this guilty man!"

BY this time the entire population of the menzil was gathered in front of the sheik's *beyt* and if they were surprised by the protestations of sudden affection for Tarzan which marked the words of their sheik they gave no evidence of it.

Stimbol raised his knife and struck, again and again, with savage maniacal force and speed.

"Take him away!" commanded Ibn Jad. "In the morning we shall gather and decide what we must do."

They dragged the terrified Stimbol to Fahd's *beyt,* where they bound him hand and foot and left him for Fahd to guard. When they had gone the Beduin leaned low above Stimbol and whispered in his ear: "Didst really slay the jungle sheik?" he demanded.

"Ibn Jad forced me to do so, and now he turns against me," whimpered Stimbol.

"And tomorrow he will have you killed so that he may tell the friends of Tarzan that he hath punished the slayer of Tarzan," said Fahd.

"Save me, Fahd!" begged Stimbol. "Save me and I will give you twenty million francs—I swear it! Once I am safe in the nearest European colony I will get the money for you. Think of it, Fahd—twenty million francs!"

"I am thinking of it, Nasrâny," replied the Beduin, "and I think that thou liest. There be not that much money in the world!"

"I swear that I have ten times that amount. If I have lied to you you may kill me. Save me! Save me!"

"Twenty million francs!" murmured Fahd. "Perchance he does not lie! Listen, Nasrâny. I do not know that I can save thee, but I shall try and if I succeed and thou forgettest the twenty million francs I shall kill thee if I have to follow thee across the world—dost understand?"

IBN JAD called two ignorant slaves to him and commanded them to go to the *beyt* that had been Zeyd's and carry Tarzan's body to the edge of the menzil where they were to dig a grave and bury it.

With paper lanterns they went to the *beyt* of death and wrapping the dead man in the old burnous that already covered him they carried him across the menzil and laid him down while they dug a shallow grave; and so, beneath a forest giant the grave of Tarzan of the Apes was made.

Roughly the slaves rolled the corpse into the hole they had made, shoveled the dirt upon it and left it in its lonely, unmarked tomb.

Early the next morning Ibn Jad called about him the elders of the tribe and when they were gathered it was noted that Tollog was missing and though a search was made he could not be found. Fahd suggested that he had gone forth early to hunt.

Ibn Jad explained to them that if they were to escape the wrath of the friends of Tarzan they must take immediate steps to disprove their responsibility for the slaying of the ape-man and that they might only do this and express their good faith by punishing the murderer.

It was not difficult to persuade them to take the life of a Christian; there was only one that demurred. This was Fahd.

"There are two reasons, Ibn Jad, why we should not now take the life of this Nasrâny," he said.

"By Ullah, there never be any reason why a true believer should not take the life of a Nasrâny!" cried one of the old men.

"Listen," admonished Fahd, "to what I have in my mind and then I am sure that you will agree that I am right."

"Speak, Fahd," said Ibn Jad.

"This Nasrâny is a rich and powerful man in his own beled. If it be possible to spare his life he will command a great ransom—dead, he is worth nothing to us. If, by chance, the friends of Tarzan do not learn of his death before we are safely out of this accursed land it will have profited us naught to have killed Stimbol and, *billah,* if we kill him now they may not believe us when we say that he slew Tarzan and we took his life in punishment.

"But if we keep him alive until we are met with the friends of Tarzan—should it so befall that they overtake us—then we may say that we did hold him prisoner that Tarzan's own people might mete out their vengeance to him, which would suit them better."

"Thy words are not without wisdom," admitted Ibn Jad, "but suppose the Nasrâny spoke lies concerning us and said that it was we who slew Tarzan? Would they not believe him above us?"

"That be easily prevented," said the old man who had spoken before. "Let us cut his tongue out forthwith that he may not bear false witness against us."

"*Wullah,* thou hast it!" agreed Ibn Jad.

"Nay!" cried Fahd. "The better we treat him the larger will be the reward that he will pay us."

"We can wait until the last moment." said Ibn Jad, "an' we see that we are to lose him and our reward, then may we cut out his tongue."

THUS the fate of Wilbur Stimbol was left to the gods, and Ibn Jad, temporarily freed from the menace of Tarzan, turned his attention once more to his plans for entering the valley. With a strong party he went in person and sought a palaver with the Galla chief.

As he approached the village of Batando he passed through the camps of thousands of Galla warriors and realized fully what he had previously sensed but vaguely—that his position was most precarious and that with the best grace possible he must agree to whatever terms the old chief might propose.

Batando received him graciously enough, though with all the majesty of a powerful monarch, and assured him that on the following day he would escort him to the entrance to the valley, but that first he must deliver to Batando all the Galla slaves that were with his party.

"But that will leave us without carriers or servants and will greatly weaken the strength of my party," cried Ibn Jad.

Batando but shrugged his black shoulders.

"Let them remain with us until we have returned from the valley," implored the sheik.

"No Galla man may accompany you," said Batando with finality.

Early the next morning the tent of Ibn Jad was struck in signal that all were to prepare for the ráhla and entirely surrounded by Galla warriors they started toward the rugged mountains where lay the entrance to the valley of Ibn Jad's dreams.

Fejjuân and the other Galla slaves that the 'Aarab had brought with them from beled el-Guâd marched with their own people, happy in their new-found freedom. Stimbol, friendless, fearful, utterly cowed, trudged wearily along under guard of two young Beduins, his mind constantly reverting to the horror of the murdered man lying in his lonely grave behind them.

WINDING steadily upward along what at times appeared to be an ancient trail and again no trail at all the Arabs and their escort climbed higher and higher into the rugged mountains that rim the Valley of the Sepulcher upon the north, and at the close of the second day, after they had made camp beside a mountain brook, Batando came to Ibn Jad and pointed to the entrance to a rocky side ravine that branched from the main cañon directly opposite the camp.

"There," he said, "lies the trail into the valley. Here we leave you and return to our villages. Upon the morrow we go."

When the sun rose the following morning Ibn Jad discovered that the Gallas had departed during the night, but he did not know that it was because of the terror they felt for the mysterious inhabitants of the mysterious valley from which no Galla ever had returned.

That day Ibn Jad spent in making a secure camp in which to leave the women and children until the warriors had re-

turned from their adventure in the valley or had discovered that they might safely fetch their women, and the next, leaving a few old men and boys to protect the camp, he set forth with those who were accounted the fighting men among them and presently the watchers in the camp saw the last of them disappear in the rocky ravine that lay opposite the menzil.

CHAPTER XVI

The Great Tourney

KING BOHUN with many knights and squires and serving-men had ridden down from his castle above the City of the Sepulcher two days before to take his way across the valley to the field before the city of Nímmr for the Great Tourney that is held once each year, commencing upon the first Sunday in Lent.

Gay pennons fluttered from a thousand lance tips and gay with color were the housings of the richly caparisoned chargers that proudly bore the Knights of the Sepulcher upon whose backs red crosses were emblazoned to denote that they had completed the pilgrimage to the Holy Land and were returning to home and England.

Their bassinets, unlike those of the Knights of Nímmr, were covered with bullock hide, and the devices upon their bucklers differed, and their colors. But for these and the crosses upon their backs they might have been Gobred's own good knights and true.

Sturdy sumpter beasts, almost as richly trapped as the knights' steeds, bore the marquees and tilts that were to house the knights during the tourney, as well as their personal belongings, their extra arms and their provisions for the three days of the tourney, for custom, over seven centuries old, forbade the Knights of Nímmr and the Knights of the Sepulcher breaking bread together.

The Great Tourney was merely a truce during which they carried on their ancient warfare under special rules which transformed it into a gorgeous pageant and an exhibition of martial prowess which noncombatants might witness in comfort and with impunity. It did not permit friendly intercourse between the two factions as this was not compatible with the seriousness of the event, in which knights of both sides often were killed, or the spirit in which the grand prize was awarded.

This prize as much as any other factor had kept open the breach of seven and a half centuries' duration that separated the Fronters from the Backers, for it consisted of five maidens whom the winners took back with them to their own city and who were never again seen by their friends or relatives.

Though the sorrow was mitigated by the honorable treatment that custom and the laws of knighthood decreed should be accorded these unfortunate maidens, it was still bitter because attached to it was the sting of defeat.

Following the tournament the maidens became the especial charges of Gobred or Bohun, dependent of course upon whether the honors of the tourney had fallen to the Fronters or the Backers, and in due course were given in honorable marriage to knights of the victorious party.

The genesis of the custom, which was now fully seven centuries old, doubtless lay in the wise desire of some ancient Gobred or Bohun to maintain the stock of both factions strong and virile by the regular infusion of new blood, as well, perhaps, as to prevent the inhabitants of the two cities from drifting too far apart in manners, customs and speech.

MANY a happy wife of Nímmr had been born in the City of the Sepulcher, and seldom was it that the girls themselves repined for long. It was considered an honor to be chosen and there were always many more volunteered than the requisite number of five that annually made the sacrifice.

The five who constituted the prize offered by the City of the Sepulcher this year rode on white palfreys and were attended by a guard of honor in silver mail. The girls, selected for their beauty to honor thus the city of their birth, were gorgeously attired and weighted down with ornaments of gold and silver and precious stones.

Upon the plain before the city of Nímmr preparations for the tourney had been in progress for many days. The lists were being dragged and rolled with heavy wooden rollers, the ancient stands of stone from which the spectators viewed the spectacle were undergoing their annual repairs and cleansing, a frame superstructure was being raised to support the canopies that would shade the choice seats reserved for the nobility, and staffs for a

thousand pennons had been set around the outer margin of the lists—these and a hundred other things were occupying a company of workmen, and in the walled city and in the castle that stood above it the hammers of armorers and smiths rang far into the nights forging iron shoes and mail and lance tips.

Blake had been assured that he was to have a part in the Great Tourney and was as keen for it as he had been for the big game of the season during his football days at college. He had been entered in two sword contests—one in which five Knights of Nímmr met five Knights of the Sepulcher and another in which he was pitted against a single antagonist, but his only contest with the lance was to be in the grand finale when a hundred Fronters faced a hundred Backers, since whereas before his encounter with Malud he had been considered hopeless with sword and buckler now Prince Gobred looked to him to win many points with these, his lance work being held but mediocre.

King Bohun and his followers were camped in a grove of oaks about a mile north of the lists, nor did the laws governing the Great Tourney permit them to come nearer until the hour appointed for their entrance upon the first day of the spectacle.

Blake, in preparing for the tourney, had followed the custom adopted by many of the knights of wearing distinctive armor and trapping his charger similarly. His chain mail was all of solid black, relieved only by the leopard skin of his bassinet, and the blue-and-silver pennon upon his lance. The housings of his mount were of black, edged with silver and blue, and there were, of course, the prescribed red crosses upon his breast and upon his horse's housings.

As he came from his quarters upon the opening morning of the tourney, followed by Edward bearing his lance and buckler, he appeared a somber figure among the more resplendently caparisoned knights and the gorgeously dressed women gathered in the great court awaiting the word to mount their horses, which were being held in the north ballium by the grooms.

That his black mail was distinctive was evidenced by the attention he immediately attracted, and that he had quickly become popular among the knights and ladies of Nímmr was equally apparent by the manner in which they clustered about him; but opinion was divided in the matter of his costume, some holding that it was too dismal.

Guinalda was there, but she remained seated upon a bench, where she was conversing with one of the maidens that had been chosen as Nímmr's prize. Blake quickly disengaged himself from those who had crowded about him and crossed the court to where Guinalda sat. At his approach the Princess looked up and inclined her head slightly in recognition of his bow and then she resumed her conversation with the maiden.

The rebuff was too obvious to permit of misunderstanding, but Blake was not satisfied to accept it and go his way without an explanation. He could scarce believe, however, that the Princess was still vexed merely because he had intimated that he had believed that she took a greater interest in him than she had admitted. There must be some other reason.

He did not turn and walk away, then, although she continued to ignore him, but stood quietly before her, waiting patiently until she should again notice him.

Presently he noted that she was becoming nervous, as was also the maiden with whom she spoke. There were lapses in their conversation; one of Guinalda's feet was tapping the flagging irritably; a slow flush was creeping upward into her cheeks. The maiden fidgeted; she plucked at the ends of the wimple that lay about her shoulders; she smoothed the rich cyclas of her mantle; and finally she arose and bowing low before the Princess asked if she might go and bid farewell to her mother.

GUINALDA bade her begone; and then, alone with Blake and no longer able to ignore him, nor caring to, she turned angrily upon him.

"I was right!" she snapped. "Thou art a forward boor. Why standest thou thus staring at me when I have made it plain that I would not be annoyed by thee? Go!"

"Because," Blake hesitated,—"because I love you."

"Sirrah!" cried Guinalda, springing to her feet. "How darest thou!"

"I would dare anything for you, my princess," replied Blake, "—because I love you."

Guinalda looked straight at him for a moment in silence; then her short upper lip curved in a contemptuous sneer and she laughed in his face.

"Thou liest!" she said. "I have heard what thou hast said concerning me!" And without waiting for a reply, she brushed past him and walked away.

Blake hurried after her. "What I have said about you?" he demanded. "I have said nothing that I would not repeat before all Nímmr. Not even have I presumed to tell my best friend, Sir Richard, that I love you. No other ears than yours have heard that."

"I have heard differently," said Guinalda, haughtily, "and I care not to discuss the matter further."

"But—" commenced Blake. But at that instant a trumpet sounded from the north gate leading into the ballium. It was the signal for the knights to mount. Guinalda's page came running to her to summon her to her father's side. Sir Richard appeared and seized Blake by the arm.

"Thou liest!" she said. "I have heard what thou hast said concerning me!"

"Come, James!" he cried. "We should have been mounted before now, for we ride in the fore rank of the knights today." And so Blake was dragged away from the Princess before he could obtain an explanation of her, to him, inexplicable attitude.

The north ballium presented a scene of color and activity, crowded as it was with knights and ladies, pages, squires, grooms, men-at-arms and horses; nor would it accommodate them all, for the overflow stretched into the east and south balliums and even through the great east gate out upon the road that leads down into the valley.

FOR half an hour something very like chaos reigned about the castle of the Prince of Nímmr, but eventually perspiring marshals and shouting heralds whipped the cortege into shape as it took its slow and imposing way down the winding mountain road toward the lists.

First rode the marshals and heralds, and behind them a score of trumpeters; then came Prince Gobred, riding alone, and following was a great company of knights, their colored pennons streaming in the wind. They rode just before the ladies; and behind the ladies was another company of knights, while in the rear marched company after company of men-at-arms, some armed with crossbows, others with pikes, and still others again with battleaxes of huge proportions.

Perhaps a hundred knights and men-at-arms all told were left behind to guard the castle and the entrance to the Valley of the Sepulcher, but these would be relieved to witness the second and third day's exercises.

As the knights of Nímmr wound down to the lists the Knights of the Sepulcher moved out from their camp among the oaks, and the marshals of the two parties timed their approach so that both entered the lists at the same time.

The ladies of Nímmr dropped out of the procession and took their places in the stand; the five maidens of Nímmr and the five from the City of the Sepulcher were escorted to a dais at one end

of the lists, after which the knights lined up in solid ranks, the Knights of Nimmr upon the south side of the lists, the Knights of the Sepulcher upon the north.

Gobred and Bohun rode forward and met in the center of the field, where, in measured and imposing tones, Bohun delivered the ancient challenge prescribed by custom and the laws of the Great Tourney, and handed Gobred the gage, the acceptance of which constituted an acceptance of the challenge and marked the official opening of the tourney.

AS Gobred and Bohun reined about and faced their own knights, these rode out of the lists—those who were not to take part in the encounters of the day seeking places in the stands after turning their chargers over to grooms, while those who were formed again for the purpose of riding once round the lists, for the double purpose of indicating to their opponents and the spectators the entrants for that day and of viewing the prizes offered by their opponents.

In addition to the maidens there were many minor prizes consisting of jeweled ornaments, suits of mail, lances, swords, bucklers, splendid steeds and the many articles that were valued by knights or might find favor in the eyes of their ladies.

The Knights of the Sepulcher paraded first, with Bohun at their head; and it was noticeable that the eyes of the King were often upon the women in the stands as he rode past. Bohun was a young man, having but just ascended the throne following the recent death of his father. He was arrogant and tyrannical, and it had been common knowledge in Nimmr that for years he had been at the head of a faction that was strong for war with Nimmr, that the city might be reduced and the entire Valley of the Sepulcher brought under the rule of the Bohuns.

His charger, prancing, his colors flying, his great company of knights at his back, King Bohun rode along the stands reserved for the people of Nimmr, and when he came to the central loge in which sat Prince Gobred and the Princess Brynilda and Princess Guinalda, his eyes fell upon the face of the daughter of Gobred.

Bohun reined in his charger and stared straight into the face of Guinalda. Gobred flushed angrily, for Bohun's act was a breach of courtesy, and half rose from his seat; but at that moment Bohun, bowing low across his mount's withers, moved on, followed by his knights.

THAT day the honors went to the Knights of the Sepulcher for they scored two hundred and twenty-seven points against one hundred and six that the Knights of Nimmr procured.

Upon the second day the tourney opened with the riding past of the entrants who, ordinarily, were conducted by a herald; but to the surprise of all, Bohun himself again led his knights past the stands, and again he paused and looked full at the Princess Guinalda.

This day the Knights of Nimmr fared a little better, being for the day but seven points behind their opponents, though the score for the two days stood two hundred and sixty-nine to three hundred and ninety-seven in favor of the Knights of the Sepulcher.

So the third day opened with the knights from the north boasting what seemed an insuperable lead of one hundred and twenty-eight points and the Knights of Nimmr spurred to greater action by the knowledge that to win the tourney they must score two hundred and thirty-two of the remaining three hundred and thirty-four points.

Once again, contrary to age-old custom, Bohun led his entrants about the lists as they paraded before the opening encounter; and once again he drew rein before the loge of Gobred, and his eyes rested upon the beautiful face of Guinalda for an instant before addressing her sire.

"Prince Gobred of Nimmr," he said in his haughty and arrogant voice, "as ye well know, my valiant sir knights have bested thine by more than six score points, and the Great Tourney be as good as ours already. Yet we would make thee a proposition."

"Speak, Bohun! The Great Tourney is yet far from won, but an' ye have any proposition that an honorable prince may consider, thou hast my assurance that 'twill be given consideration."

"Thy five maidens are as good as ours," said Bohun; "but give me thy daughter to be queen of the Valley of the Sepulcher, and I will grant thee the tourney."

Gobred went white with anger, but when he replied, his voice was low and even, for he was master of his own emotions, as befitted a princely man.

"Sir Bohun," he said, refusing to accord to his enemy the title of king, "thy words are an offense in the ears of honorable men, implying as they do that the daughter of a Gobred be for sale, and that the honor of the knighthood of Nímmr may be bartered for.

"Get thee hence to thine own side of the lists before I set serfs upon ye to drive ye there with staves."

"So that is thy answer, eh?" shouted Bohun. "Then know ye that I shall take the five maidens by the rules of the Great Tourney and thy daughter by force of arms!" And with this threat delivered, he wheeled his steed and spurred away.

WORD of Bohun's proposition and his rebuff spread like wild-fire throughout the ranks of the Knights of Nímmr, so that those who were to contend this last day of the tourney were keyed to the highest pitch of derring-do in the defense of the honor of Nímmr and the protection of the Princess Guinalda.

The great lead attained by the Knights of the Sepulcher during the first two days was but an added incentive to greater effort, provoking them, as a spur, to the utmost limits of daring and exertion.

Blake's sword-and-buckler encounter with a knight of the Sepulcher was scheduled for the first event of the day, and when the lists were cleared he rode in to a fanfare of trumpets, moving parallel with the south stands while his adversary rode along the front of the north stands, the latter halting before the loge of Bohun as Blake drew rein in front of that of Gobred, where he raised the hilt of his sword to his lips to the Prince, though his eyes were upon Guinalda.

"Conduct thyself as a true knight this day, to the glory and honor of Nímmr," charged Gobred, "and may the blessings of Our Lord Jesus be upon thee and thy sword, our well-beloved Sir James!"

"To the glory and honor of Nímmr I pledge my sword and my life!" should have been Blake's reply according to the usages of the Great Tourney.

"To the glory and honor of Nímmr and to the protection of my Princess I pledge my sword and my life!" is what he said, and it was evident from the expression on Gobred's face that he was not displeased, while the look of haughty disdain which had been upon Guinalda's face softened.

Slowly she arose, and tearing a ribbon from her gown, stepped to the front of the loge. "Receive this favor from thy lady, sir knight," she said, "bearing it with honor and to victory in thy encounter."

Blake reined close to the rail of the loge and bent low while Guinalda pinned the ribbon upon his shoulder. His face was close to hers; he sensed the intoxicating perfume of her hair; he felt her warm breath upon his cheek.

"I love you," he whispered, so low that no other ears than hers could hear.

"Thou art a boor," she replied in a voice as low as his. "It is for the sake of the five maidens that I encourage you with this favor."

Blake looked straight into her eyes. "I love you, Guinalda," he said, "and—you love me!"

Before she could reply, he had wheeled away, the trumpets had sounded, and he was cantering slowly toward the end of the field where the tilts of the Knights of Nímmr stood.

The young lad Edward, very much excited, was there; and Sir Richard and Michel, with a marshal, heralds, trumpeters, men-at-arms—a martial company to aid him with encouragement and advice.

Blake cast aside his buckler; nor was there any to reprove him now. Instead they smiled proudly and knowingly, for had they not seen him best Sir Malud without other defense than his horsemanship and his sword?

The trumpets blared again. Blake turned and put spurs to his charger. Straight down the center of the lists he rode, and from the opposite end came a knight of the Sepulcher to meet him!

"Sir James! Sir James!" cried the spectators in the stands upon the south side, while the north stands answered with the name of their champion.

"Who is the black knight?" asked many a man in the north stands of his neighbor.

"He hath no buckler!" cried some. "He is mad—Sir Guy will cleave him open at the first pass!" "Sir Guy! Sir Guy!"

CHAPTER XVII

"The Saracens!"

JUST as the second day of the Great Tourney had opened in the Valley of the Sepulcher upon the plains below the city of Nímmr, a band of swart men in

soiled *thôbs* and carrying long matchlocks topped the summit of the pass upon the north side of the valley and looked down upon the City of the Sepulcher and the castle of King Bohun.

They had followed upward along what may once have been a trail, but for so long a time, or so infrequently had it been used, that it was scarce distinguishable from the surrounding brush, but below them now Ibn Jad saw at a short distance a better marked road; and beyond, what appeared to him a fortress. Beyond that again he glimpsed the battlements of Bohun's castle.

What he saw in the foreground was the barbican guarding the approach to the castle and the city, both of which were situated in much the same relative position as were the barbican and castle upon the south side of the valley where Prince Gobred guarded the city of Nímmr and the valley beyond it.

Seeking cover, Ibn Jad and his Beduins crept down toward the barbican where an old knight and a few men-at-arms kept perfunctory ward. Hiding in the mountain brush the Arab saw two strangely appareled blacks hunting just outside the great gateway. They were armed with crossbows and short arrows, and their prey was rabbits. For years they had seen no stranger come down this ancient road, and for years they had hunted between the gate and the summit of the mountains, though further than this they were not permitted to wander; nor had they any great desire to do so, for, though they were descendants of Gallas who lived just beyond this mountain top, they thought that they were Englishmen and that a horde of Saracens awaited to annihilate them should they venture too far afield.

Today they hunted as they had often hunted when they chanced to be placed in the guard at the outer barbican. They moved silently forward, warily awaiting the break of a rabbit. They did not see the dark-faced men hiding in the brush.

IBN Jad saw that the great gateway was open and that the gate that closed it raised and lowered vertically. It was raised now.

Ibn Jad motioned those nearest him to follow and crept slowly closer to the gateway. What of the old knight and the other watchers? The former was partaking of a late breakfast just within one of the great towers of the barbican, and the latter were taking advantage of the laxity of his discipline to catch a few more winks of sleep as they stretched beneath the shade of some trees within the ballium.

Ibn Jad won to within a few yards of the gateway and waited for the others to reach his side. When they were all there, he whispered to them and then trotted on silent sandals toward the gate, his matchlock ready in his hands. Behind him came his fellows, and they were all within the ballium before the men-at-arms were aware that there was an enemy this side of Palestine.

With crossbow and battleax the men-at-arms sprang to defend the gate, and their cries of "The Saracens! The Saracens!" brought the old sir knight and the hunters running toward the ballium.

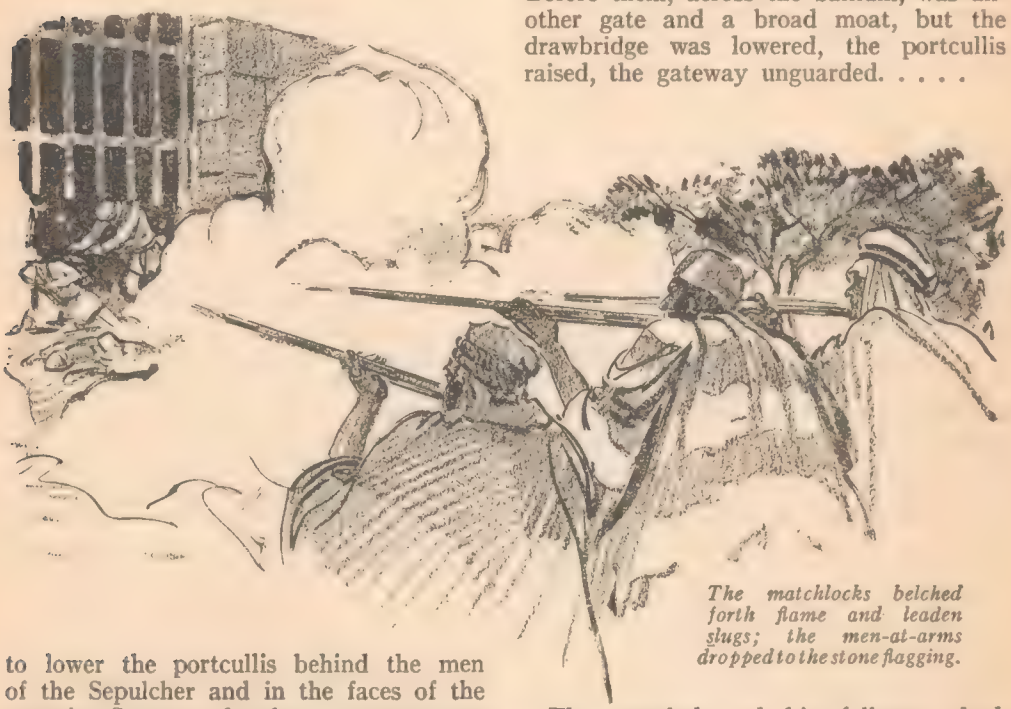
Below, at the castle of King Bohun, the men at the gates and the other retainers who had been left while Bohun sallied forth to the Great Tourney heard strange noises from the direction of the outer barbican. The shouts of men floated down to them and strange, sharp sounds that were like thunder and yet unlike it. Such sounds they had never heard before, nor any of their forebears. They rallied at the outer castle gate, and the knights with them consulted as to what was best to be done.

Being brave knights there seemed but one thing open for them. If those at the far outer barbican had been attacked, they must hasten to their defense. Summoning all but four of the knights and men-at-arms at his disposal, the marshal of the castle mounted and rode forth toward the outer gate.

Halfway there, they were espied by Ibn Jad and his men, who, having overcome the poorly armed soldiers at the gate, were advancing down the road toward the castle. At sight of these reinforcements Ibn Jad hastened to secrete his followers and himself in the bushes that lined the roadway, and so it fell that the marshal rode by them and did not see them; and when they had passed, Ibn Jad and his followers came out of the bushes and continued down the winding mountain road toward the castle of King Bohun.

The men at the castle gate, now fully upon the alert, stood ready with the port-

cullis raised as the marshal had instructed them, so that in the event that those who had ridden out should be hard pressed upon their return by an enemy at their rear they could still find sanctuary within the ballium, the plan being, in such event,



The matchlocks belched forth flame and leaden slugs; the men-at-arms dropped to the stone flagging.

to lower the portcullis behind the men of the Sepulcher and in the faces of the pursuing Saracens, for that an enemy must be Saracen was a foregone conclusion—had not they and their ancestors waited for near seven and a half centuries now for this expected assault?

They wondered if it really had come at last and while they discussed the question Ibn Jad watched them from a concealing clump of bushes a few yards away.

THE wily Beduin knew the purpose of that portcullis and he was trying to plan how best he might enter the enclosure beyond before it could be dropped before his face. At last he found a plan and smiled. He beckoned three men to come close, and into their ears he whispered that which he had in mind.

There were four men-at-arms ready to drop the portcullis at the psychological moment and all four of them stood in plain sight of Ibn Jad and the three that were beside him. Carefully, cautiously, noiselessly, the four Arabs raised their ancient matchlocks and took careful aim.

"Now!" whispered Ibn Jad, and four matchlocks belched forth flame and black powder and leaden slugs.

The four men-at-arms dropped to the stone flagging, and Ibn Jad and all his followers raced forward and stood within the ballium of the castle of King Bohun. Before them, across the ballium, was another gate and a broad moat, but the drawbridge was lowered, the portcullis raised, the gateway unguarded. . . . .

The marshal and his followers had ridden unhindered into the ballium of the outer barbican, and there they had found all its defenders lying in their own blood, even to the little squire of the old knight who should have watched the gate and did not.

One of the men-at-arms still lived, and in his dying breath he gasped the terrible truth. The Saracens—come at last!

"Where are they?" demanded the marshal.

"Didst thou not see them, sir?" asked the dying man. "They marched down the road toward the castle."

"Impossible!" cried the marshal, "we did but ride along that very road and saw no one."

"They marched down toward the castle," gasped the man.

The marshal knit his brows. "Were there many?" he demanded.

"There were few," replied the man-at-arms. "It was but the advance guard of the armies of the Sultan."

Just then the volley that laid low the four warders at the castle gate crashed upon the ears of the marshal and his men.

"Odsblud!" he cried.

"They must have hid themselves in the bush as we passed," exclaimed a knight at the marshal's side, "for of a surety they are there, and we here; and there is but one road from there to here."

"There are but four men at the castle gate," said the marshal, "and I did bid them keep the 'cullis up till we returned. God pity me! I have given over the Sepulcher to the Saracens. Slay me, Sir Morley!"

"Nay, man! We need every lance and sword and crossbow that we may command. This is no time to think of taking thy life when thou canst give it to Our Lord Jesus in defense of His sepulcher against the infidels!"

"Thou art right, Morley," cried the marshal. "Remain thou here, then, with six men and hold this gate. I shall return with the others and give battle at the castle!"

BUT when the marshal came again to the castle gate he found the portcullis down and a dark-faced bearded Saracen glaring at him through the iron bars. The marshal gave the order for crossbowmen to shoot the fellow down, but as they raised their weapons to their shoulders, there was a loud explosion that almost deafened them, and flame leaped from a strange thing that the Saracen held against his shoulder and pointed at them. One of the crossbowmen screamed and lunged forward upon his face, and the others turned and fled.

They were brave men in the face of dangers that were natural and to be expected, but in the presence of the supernatural, the weird, the uncanny, they reacted as most men do, and what could have been more weird than death leaping in flame and with a great noise through space to strike their fellow down?

But Sir Bulland, the marshal, was a knight of the Sepulcher, and something more potent than fear of death held him there. It is called honor.

Sir Bulland could not run away and so he sat there on his great horse and challenged the Saracens to mortal combat—challenged them to send their doughtiest sir knight to meet him and thus decide who should hold the gate.

But the Arabs already held it. Furthermore they did not understand him; and in addition to all this they were without honor as Sir Bulland knew it, and perhaps as anyone other than a Bedouin knows it, and would but have laughed at his silly suggestion.

One thing they did know—two things they knew; that he was a Nasrâny and that he was unarmed. They did not count his great lance and his sword as weapons, for he could not reach them with either. So one of them took careful aim and shot Sir Bulland through his chain mail where it covered his noble and chivalrous heart. . . . .

Ibn Jad now had the run of the castle of King Bohun, and he was sure that he had discovered the fabled City of Nímmr, that the *sáhar* had told him of. He herded together the women and children and the few men that remained and held them under guard. For a while he was minded to slay them, since they were but Nasrâny; but he was so pleased at having found and taken the treasure-city that he let them live—for the time, at least.

At his command his followers ransacked the castle in search of the treasure; nor were they disappointed, for the riches of Bohun were great. There is gold in the hills of the Valley of the Sepulcher, and there are precious stones to be found there also. For seven and a half centuries the slaves of the Sepulcher and of Nímmr have been washing gold from the creek-beds and salvaging precious stones from the same source. The value of these things is not to the men of the Sepulcher and Nímmr what it would be to men of the outer world. They but esteemed these things as trinkets; yet they liked them and saved them and even bartered for them on occasion; but they did not place them in vaults under lock and key, and why should they in a land where such things were not stolen? Their women and their horses they kept under guard, but not their gold or their jewels.

And so Ibn Jad gathered a great sack full of treasure, enough to satisfy his wildest imaginings of cupidity. He gathered all that he could find in the castle of King Bohun, more than he had hoped to find in this fabled city; and then a strange thing happened. Having more wealth than he possibly could use he wanted more. No, not so strange, after all, for Ibn Jad was human.

He spent the night with his followers in the castle of King Bohun and during the night he planned, for he had seen a wide valley stretching far away to other mountains and at the base of those mountains he had seen that which appeared to be a city. "Perhaps," thought Ibn Jad, "it is a richer city than this! I shall start on the morrow to see."

CHAPTER XVIII

The Black Knight

DOWN the field thundered the two chargers. Silence fell upon the stands. They were almost met when Sir Guy realized that his adversary bore no shield. But what of that? He had been sent into the lists by his own people—the responsibility was theirs, the advantage Sir Guy's. Had they sent him in without a sword, Sir Guy might still have slain him without besmirching his knightly honor, for such were the laws of the Great Tourney.

Yet his discovery had its effect upon the knight of the Sepulcher as just for an instant it had distracted his attention from the thought that should have been uppermost in his mind—gaining the primary advantage by the skill of his opening attack.

He saw his antagonist's horse swing out just before they met; he stood in his stirrups, as had Sir Malud, to deliver a terrific cut; then Blake threw his horse straight into the shoulder of Sir Guy's; the latter's sword fell and, with a loud clanging noise, slipped harmlessly from the blade of the knight of Nimmr. Guy had raised his buckler to protect his own head and neck and could not see Sir James. Guy's horse stumbled and nearly fell, and as it recovered itself, Blake's blade slipped beneath the buckler of the knight of the Sepulcher and its point pierced the gorget of his adversary and passed through his throat.

With a cry that ended in a blood-choked gurgle, Sir Guy of the Sepulcher toppled backward upon his horse's rump and rolled upon the ground, while the south stands went mad with joy.

The laws of the Great Tourney account the knight slain who is unhorsed, so the *coup de grace* is never given and no knight is killed unnecessarily. The victor rides to the tent of the vanquished, wheels about and gallops to his own tent, the full length of the lists, where he waits until a herald of the opposing side fetches the prize to him.

And so it was that as Blake swung from his saddle, sword in hand, and approached the fallen Sir Guy, a gasp arose from the south stands and a roar of angry protest from the north.

Marshals and heralds galloped madly from the tilt of the fallen Backer; and seeing this, Sir Richard, fearing that Blake would be set upon and slain, led a similar party from his end of the field.

Blake approached the fallen knight, who lay upon his back, feebly struggling to arise, and when the spectators looked to see him run Sir Guy through with his sword, they saw him instead toss the weapon to the ground and kneel beside the wounded man.

With an arm beneath Sir Guy's shoulders he raised him and held him against his knee while he tore off helmet and gorget, and when the marshals and the heralds and the others drew rein beside him, Blake was trying to stanch the flow of blood.

"Quick!" he cried to them. "A surgeon! His jugular is not touched, but this flow of blood must be stopped."

Several of the knights dismounted and gathered about, and among them was Sir Richard. A herald of Sir Guy's faction kneeled and took the youth from Blake.

"Come!" said Richard. "Leave the sir knight to his own friends."

Blake arose. He saw how peculiar were the expressions upon the faces of the knights about him, but as he drew away, one of them, an older man, who was one of Bohun's marshals, spoke.

"Thou art a generous and chivalrous knight," he said to Blake, "and a courageous one too, who would thus set at naught the laws of the Great Tourney and the customs of centuries."

Blake faced him squarely. "I do not give a damn for your laws or your customs," he said. "Where I come from a decent man wouldn't let a yellow dog bleed to death without trying to save him, much less a brave and gallant boy like this; and because he fell by my hand, by the customs of my country I should be compelled to aid him."

"Yes," explained Sir Richard, "as otherwise he would be punished with a raspberry."

THE winning of the first event of the day was but a forerunner of a series of successes on the part of the Knights of Nímmr until, at the opening of the last event, the score showed four hundred fifty-two points for them against four hundred forty-eight for their opponents; but a margin of four points was as nothing at this stage of the tourney, as the final event held one hundred points which Fate might allot almost entirely to one side.

This was the most spectacular event of the whole tourney, and one which the spectators always looked forward to with the greatest anticipation. Two hundred knights were engaged in it, one hundred knights of Nímmr, against one hundred knights of the Sepulcher. They formed at opposite ends of the lists, and as the trumpets sounded the signal, they charged with lances and thus they fought until all of one side had been unhorsed or had retired from the field because of wounds. Broken lances could be replaced as a polo player may ride out and obtain a fresh mallet when he breaks his. Otherwise there were few rules to govern this concluding number of the Great Tourney, which more nearly approximated a battle scene than any other event of the three days of conflict.

Blake had won his fifteen points for the Knights of Nímmr in the opening event of the day, and again with four other comrades, pitted against five mounted swordsmen from the north, he had helped to add still further points to the growing score of the Fronters.

He was entered in the last event largely because the marshals appreciated the value of his horsemanship and felt that it would more than compensate for his inexperience with the lance.

THE two hundred mailed knights had paraded for the final event and were forming line at opposite ends of the lists, one hundred knights of the Sepulcher at one end and one hundred knights of Nímmr at the other. Their chargers, especially selected for this encounter, were powerful and fleet—chosen for their courage, too, as were the youths who bestrode them.

The knights, with few exceptions, were youths in their twenties, for to youth went the laurels of this great sport of the Middle Ages as they still do in the sports of today. Here and there was a man of middle age, a hardened veteran whose heart and hand had withstood the march of years and whose presence exerted a steadying influence upon the young knights while it spurred them to their utmost efforts, for these were champions whose deeds were sung by minstrels in the great halls of the castles of Nímmr.

In proud array, with upright lances and fluttering pennons, the sunlight glinting from burnished mail and bit and boss and shining brightly upon the gorgeous housings of their mounts, the two hundred presented a proud and noble spectacle as they awaited the final summons of the trumpet.

Rearing and plunging, eager to be off, many a war-horse broke the line as will a thoroughbred at the barrier, while at one side and opposite the center of the lists a herald waited for the moment that both lines should be formed before he gave the signal that would send these iron men hurtling into combat.

Blake found himself well toward the center of the line of Nímmr's knights, beneath him a great black that fretted to be off, before him the flower of the knighthood of the Sepulcher. In his right hand he grasped a heavy iron-shod lance, the butt of which rested in a boot at his stirrup, and upon his left arm he bore a great shield; nor had he any wish to discard it in the face of all those sturdy iron-tipped lances.

As he looked down the long length of the lists upon the hundred knights that would presently be racing toward him in solid array with lance-points projecting far ahead of their horses, Blake felt that his shield was entirely inadequate, and he experienced a certain nervousness that reminded him of similar moments of tense waiting for the referee's whistle during his football days—those seemingly long-gone days of another life that he sensed now as a remote and different incarnation.

At last came the signal! He saw the herald raise his sword on high. With the two hundred he gathered his restive charger and couched his lance. The sword fell! From the four corners of the lists trumpets blared; from two hundred throats rose the *cri de guerre;* four hundred spurs transmitted the awaited signal from man to horse.

The thundering lines bore down the

field; a score of heralds raced along the flanks and rear to catch any infraction of the sole regulation that bore upon the final tumultuous collision. Each knight must engage the foe upon his bridle hand, for to couch his lance upon the one upon his right was an unknightly act, since thus a single knight might have two lances set upon him at once, against which there could be no defense.

From above the rim of his shield Blake saw the solid front of lances, iron-shod chargers and great shields almost upon him. Their speed, weight, and momentum seemed irresistible and Blake felt a sudden deep respect for the knights of old.

And now the two lines were about to meet! The spectators sat in spellbound silence; the riders, grim-jawed, with tight-set lips, were voiceless now.

Blake, his lance across his horse's withers, picked the knight riding toward him upon his left hand; for an instant he caught the other's eyes, and then each crouched behind his shield as the two lines came together with a deafening crash.

Blake's shield smashed back against his face and body with such terrific force that he was almost carried from his saddle. He felt his own lance strike and splinter; and then, half stunned, he was through the iron line, his charger, frantic and uncontrolled, running wildly toward the tents of Bohun's knights.

With an effort Blake pulled himself together, gathered his reins and finally managed to get his horse under control, and it was not until he had reined him about that he got his first glimpse of the result of the opening encounter. A half-dozen chargers were scrambling to their feet, and nearly a score more were galloping riderless about the lists. A full twenty-five knights lay upon the field, and twice that many squires and serving men were running in on foot to succor their masters.

"'Sdeath!" Sir Wildred cried. "Thou laughest at me, sirrah?" "If I look as funny as you do," Blake assured him, "you've got a laugh coming too!"

Already several of the knights had again set their lances against an enemy, and Blake saw one of the knights of the Sepulcher bearing down upon him, but he raised his broken spear-shaft above his head to indicate that he was momentarily *hors de combat*, and galloped swiftly back to his own end of the lists, where Edward was awaiting him with a fresh weapon.

"Thou didst nobly well, beloved master," cried Edward.

"Did I get my man?" asked Blake.

"That thou didst, sir," Edward assured him, beaming with pride and pleasure, "and though thou brokest thy lance upon his shield, thou didst e'en so unhorse him."

ARMED anew, Blake turned back toward the center of the lists, where many individual encounters were taking place. Already several more knights were down, and the victors looking for new conquests, in which the stands were assisting with hoarse cries and advice; and as Blake rode back into the lists, he was espied by many in the north stands occupied by the knights and followers of the Sepulcher.

"The black knight!" they cried. "Here! Here! Sir Wildred! Here is the black knight that overthrew Sir Guy. Have at him, Sir Wildred!"

Sir Wildred, a hundred yards away, couched his lance. "Have at thee, Sir Black Knight!" he shouted.

"You're on!" Blake shouted back, putting spurs to the great black.

Sir Wildred was a large man, and he bestrode a raw-boned roan with the speed of a deer and the heart of a lion. The pair would have been a match for the best of Nimmr's knighthood.

Perhaps it was as well for Blake's peace of mind that Wildred appeared to him like any other knight and that he did not know that he was the most sung of all the heroes of the Sepulcher.

As a matter of fact, any knight looked formidable to Blake, who was still at a loss to understand how he had unhorsed his man in the first encounter of this event.

"The bird must have lost both stirrups," is what he had mentally assured himself when Edward had announced his victory.

But he couched his lance like a good sir knight and true, and bore down upon the redoubtable Sir Wildred. The knight of the Sepulcher was charging diagonally across the field from the south stands; and beyond him Blake caught a glimpse of a slim, girlish figure standing in the central loge. He could not see her eyes, but he knew that they were upon him.

"For my Princess!" he whispered as Sir Wildred loomed large before him.

LANCE smote on shield as the two knights crashed together with terrific force, and Blake felt himself lifted clear of his saddle and hurled heavily to the ground.

Luckily, he was neither stunned nor badly hurt, and as he sat up a sudden grin wreathed his face, for there, scarce a lance-length from him, sat Sir Wildred; but Sir Wildred did not smile.

"'Sdeath!" he cried. "Thou laughest at me, sirrah?"

"If I look as funny as you do," Blake assured him, "you've got a laugh coming too."

Sir Wildred knit his brows. "Odsblud!" he exclaimed. "An' thou beest a knight of Nimmr, I am a Saracen! Who art thou? Thy speech savoreth not of the Valley."

Blake had arisen. "Hurt much?" he asked stepping forward. "Here, I'll give you a hand up."

"Thou art, of a certainty, a strange sir knight," said Wildred. "I recall now that thou didst offer succor to Sir Guy when thou hadst fairly vanquished him."

"Well, what's wrong with that?" asked Blake. "I haven't anything against you. We've had a bully good scrap and are out of it. Why should we sit here and make faces at one another?"

Sir Wildred shook his head. "Thou art beyond my comprehension," he admitted.

By this time their squires and a couple of serving men had arrived, but neither of the fallen knights was so badly injured that he could not walk without assistance, and as they started for their respective tilts, Blake turned and smiled.

"So long, old man!" he cried cheerily. "Hope we meet again some day."

Still shaking his head, Sir Wildred limped away, followed by the two who had come to assist him.

AT his tent Blake learned that the outcome of the Great Tourney still hung in the balance, and it was another half-hour before the last of the knights of Nimmr went down in defeat, leaving two knights of the Sepulcher victorious upon the field; but this was not enough to overcome the lead of four points that the Fronters had held at the opening of the last event, and a moment later the heralds announced that the knights of Nimmr had won the Great Tourney by the close margin of two points.

Amidst the shouting of the occupants of the stands at the south, the knights of Nimmr who had taken part in the tourney and had won points for the Fronters formed to ride upon the lists and claim the grand prize. Not all were there, as some had been killed or wounded in encounters that had followed their victories,

though the toll on both sides had been much smaller than Blake had imagined that it would be. Five men were dead and perhaps twenty too badly injured to ride, the casualties about equally divided.

As the knights of Nímmr rode down the field to claim the five maidens from the City of the Sepulcher, Bohun gathered all his knights at his side of the lists as though preparing to ride back to his camp; and at the same time a knight of the Sepulcher, wearing the leopard-skin bassinet of Nímmr, entered the stands upon the south side of the field and made his way toward the loge of Prince Gobred.

Bohun watched. The Knights of Nímmr were at the far end of the field engrossed in the ritualistic rites that the laws of the Great Tourney prescribed for the reception of the five maidens.

Close beside Bohun two young knights sat their chargers, their eyes upon their king, and one of them held the bridle-reins of a riderless horse.

Suddenly Bohun raised his hand and spurred across the field, followed by his knights. They moved a little toward the end of the field where the knights of Nímmr were congregated so that the bulk of them were between this end of the field and Gobred's loge.

The young knight who had sat close beside Bohun, and his companion leading the riderless horse, spurred at a run straight for the stands of Nímmr and the loge of the Prince. As they drew in abreast of it, a knight leaped into the loge from the rear, swept Guinalda into his arms, tossed her quickly to the young knight waiting to receive her, sprang to the edge of the rail and leaped into the saddle of the spare horse being held in readiness for him; then they both wheeled and spurred away before the surprised Gobred or those about him could raise a hand to stay them. Behind them swept Bohun and the knights of the Sepulcher out toward the camp among the oaks.

INSTANTLY all was pandemonium. A trumpeter in Gobred's loge sounded the alarm; the Prince ran from the stands to the spot where his horse was being held by a groom; the knights of Nímmr, ignorant of what had occurred, not knowing where to rally or against whom, milled about the lists for a few moments.

Then Gobred came, spurring swiftly before them. "Bohun has stolen the Princess Guinalda!" he cried. "Knights of Nímmr—" But before he could say more, or issue orders to his followers, a black knight on a black charger spurred roughly through the ranks of surrounding knights and was away after the retreating knights of the Sepulcher.

CHAPTER XIX

Lord Tarzan

THERE was a nasty smile upon Tollog's lips as he thought how neatly he had foiled Ateja, who would have warned the Nasrâny of the plot to slay him, 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 in his beard, a hand reached out of the darkness behind him and seized him by the throat—fingers grasped him and he was dragged away.

Into the *beyt* that had been Zeyd's and which had been set up for the Nasrâny, Tollog was dragged. He struggled and tried to scream for help, but he was powerless in the grip of steel that held him and choked him.

Inside the *beyt* a voice whispered in his ear. "Cry out, Tollog!" he said, "and I shall have to kill you." And then the grasp upon his throat relaxed, but Tollog did not call for help, for he had recognized the voice that spoke and he knew that it had made no idle threat.

He lay still while the bonds were drawn tight about his wrists and ankles and a gag fastened securely in his mouth. He felt the folds of his burnous drawn across his face and then—silence.

He heard Stimbol creep into the *beyt*, but he thought that it was still he who had bound him. And thus died Tollog, the brother of Ibn Jad, as he had planned that Tarzan of the Apes should die.

And, knowing that he would die thus, there was a smile upon the lips of the ape-man as he swung through the forest toward the southeast.

Tarzan's quest was not for Beduin but for Blake, and having assured himself that the white man in the menzil of Ibn Jad was Stimbol and that none knew the whereabouts of the other American, he was hastening back to the locality where Blake's boys had told him their *bwana* had

disappeared, in the hope of picking up his trail and, if unable to assist him, at least to learn what fate had overtaken him.

Tarzan moved swiftly and his uncanny senses of sight and smell aided him greatly in wresting its secrets from the jungle, yet it was three days before he found the spot where Ara the lightning had struck down Blake's gun-bearer.

Here he discovered Blake's faint spoor leading toward the north. Tarzan shook his head, for he knew that there was a stretch of uninhabited forest lying between this place and the first Galla villages; and he knew, too, that if Blake survived hunger and the menace of wild beasts, he might only live to fall victim to a Galla spear.

For two days Tarzan followed a spoor that no other human eye might have discerned, and upon the afternoon of the second day he came upon a great stone cross built directly in the center of an ancient trail; but Tarzan saw the cross from the concealment of bushes, for he moved as beasts of prey move, taking advantage of every cover, suspicious of every strange object, always ready for flight or battle as occasion might demand.

And so it was that he did not walk blindly into the clutches of the two men-at-arms that guarded the outer way to the City of Nimmr. To his keen ears was borne the sound of their voices long before he saw them.

Even as Sheeta or Numa approach their prey, so Tarzan of the Apes crept through the brush until he lay within a few yards of the men-at-arms and to his vast astonishment heard them conversing in a quaint form of English that, while understandable to him, seemed yet a foreign tongue. He marveled at their antiquated costumes and obsolete weapons, and in them he saw an explanation of Blake's disappearance and a suggestion of his fate.

For a time Tarzan lay watching the two with steady, unblinking eyes—it might have been Numa, himself, weighing the chances of a sudden charge. He saw that each was armed with a sturdy pike and a sword. They could speak English, after a fashion; therefore, they might be able to give him word of Blake. But would they receive him in a friendly spirit—or attempt to set upon and slay him?

The ensuing chapters of this remarkable romance are even more thrilling. Watch for them in the next, the April, issue.

The White Elephant

By

BUD LA MAR

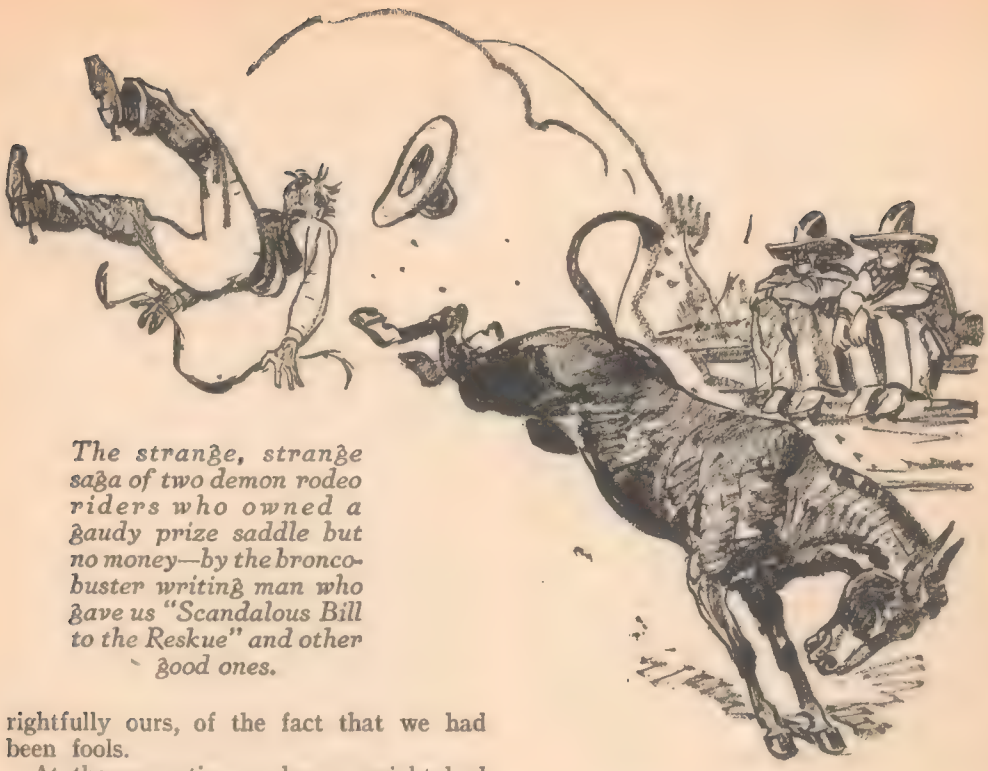
Illustrated by
Frank Hoban

"I'LL tell the whole wide world," said Slim Parkins, "that hereinafter and till hell freezes over, I will take no part in any way, shape or form in any rodeo where cash prizes have been substituted by silver-decorated saddles, artistic hand-painted seatless britches, hair-braided penitentiary-made bridles or any other do-dads for which I have no use whatever."

I regretfully pushed away from me a large platter which had contained my second order of ham and eggs, reached with determination for a smaller dish of pie and ice-cream, realized the impossibility of disposing of any portion of it, lit a cigar and by silence, agreed with my partner.

This had been the first soul-satisfying, stomach-filling meal in which we had taken active part for several days. At the proper time another would follow. When night came, we would sleep—in a bed. We had one hundred and twenty-five dollars ($125.00).

Under different circumstances, the world would have seemed a good place to live in, the future a bright path into the unknown, full of thrills and adventures, the past—well, anyway that was over! Slim and I had a grievance; life had played us a dirty trick. Our hundred and twenty-five dollars ($125.00) was only a reminder of better things that could have been, of more wealth that was



The strange, strange saga of two demon rodeo riders who owned a gaudy prize saddle but no money—by the bronco-buster writing man who gave us "Scandalous Bill to the Reskue" and other good ones.

My mule leaped high into the air, but instead of coming down with it I kept sailing for the clouds.

rightfully ours, of the fact that we had been fools.

At the same time, a heavy weight had been lifted from our minds. We had managed, after a great deal of trouble, to rid ourselves of the ownership of a White Elephant—*i. e.*, a thousand-dollar saddle. We, or rather Slim, had won it riding a horse named Deer-foot in the finals of a bucking contest held in Green City, Arkansas. Being Slim's partner, I held a half interest in this masterpiece of the saddle-maker's art. There had been previous contests where I had won and Slim lost—and also many others where both of us had lost, but that's another story.

THE winning of the White Elephant was the cause for a large celebration. We carried our prize to a hotel room, laid it tenderly upon the bed and spent several happy hours admiring it. It was indeed a thing of beauty. It seemed that half the leather was covered over with heavy silver mountings. The wide stirrup leathers and the skirts were beautifully stamped with pictures of running steers and bucking horses.

Proud owners of a thing of real value, we made no plans for the immediate future. The proper thing to do was to stage a fitting holiday and this we set out to do. With many a backward glance we succeeded in tearing ourselves away from the room, each of us making certain that the door was securely locked. However, the separation from our valuable possession was not to be endured long. Following several drinks of a certain product for which this community was famous, an argument arose having to do with riggings. Slim insisted that our saddle was equipped with a Spanish rig; I held for a three-quarter. The only way to settle it was to return to our room and see for ourselves. This we proceeded to do, taking with us a full quart bottle of the well-known tonic.

It was proven beyond the shadow of a doubt that I was correct—and so we took a drink. Then later, I congratulated Slim for his skill and endurance in riding an outlaw like old Deer-foot; this called for another drink. Each and every event of any importance having taken place since the forming of our partnership was remembered and celebrated accordingly. And so, far into the night, until the bottle was empty.

"How much money you got?" I was brutally awakened in the midst of a

dream wherein it seemed I was riding a buckskin horse with a silver mane and tail, in a silver-decorated saddle. The surrounding country was range land, not a fence as far as you could see; grass grew knee high to a tall Indian; fat, sleek cattle grazed in small bunches. The horse was mine, the saddle was mine; also the grass and the cattle. Slim did not belong in this dream. It was not a partnership dream. Disregarding the fact, he had thrust his unwelcome presence into this cowboy's paradise and his first thought had been of money.

Without even opening my eyes, I inserted my right hand into the trouser pocket where I generally kept my roll—when I had one. Suddenly, I was fully awake. Gone was the silver horse, the perfect grazing land, the fat cattle. All that remained of my dream was the saddle. It lay on the bed, beside me, the morning sun playing on its bright ornaments. My hand slowly came out of the vacuum that was my pocket. Slim limped to the washstand, saying simply: "Oh, gosh!"

We had been broke before and knew just what steps to take to obtain transportation to a meal ticket and more cash, to-wit, a freight train to the next rodeo. But we had never owned a thousand-dollar saddle before. In silence we put on our hats and went out of the hotel into main street.

THIS thoroughfare, yesterday full of action, was today cheerless, desolate and devoid of life. Strangers in a strange land, we craved company; to hold conversation with other cowboys would help for a time to forget our present financial state. The vision of "Prairie Dog" Barnes dragging his boot-heels in our direction placed in our minds a hopeful idea that perhaps he could be convinced of loaning us the sum necessary to carry us to Denver—the next and nearest contest being scheduled to take place there within a week. "Prairie Dog" was a trick rider and roper. He always had money in his pockets. He drove an automobile!

"How!" said Slim jauntily, placing himself on one side and I on the other so that to pass would necessitate the bumping of one of us. "Looks like rain, don't it?"

"Yah, shore does," answered Barnes. He stopped but longed to go on his way.

"Where you goin' from here—Denver?"

"You bet, leavin' this mawnin'." He made to go between us, but he was our only hope of riding the cushions and we closed up the gap, blocking his path. Seeing through our scheme of detaining him, he reached for his makings and said:

"What's on yore mind, boys?"

"Well," admitted Slim. "We thought that maybe, since you're goin' to Denver and we're goin' there too, you might loan us enough to buy our tickets. You see we're broke but we got that there fancy saddle and we aim to sell it, when we git to where we can."

"How much you need?"

"Oh, I reckon fifty would take us there fine and dandy. Yah, we could make it on fifty." Prospects were becoming brighter; it looked like we would get the money. We waited anxiously for Prairie Dog's answer. At last he drawled:

"All right boys, bring yore saddle down and I'll lend you fifty on it. You can have it any time you pay me back."

"What?" cried Slim. "Take our saddle? Lord, no! Keep yore money, you four-flushin', grandstand-lovin' *trick-roper!*" (This last uttered with deep contempt.) Slim and I started indignantly away. Of course we couldn't give up our saddle. We would starve first!

The first shadows of night found us walking in a westerly direction, away from Green City. Our intentions were to follow the railroad tracks until we came to a crossing, stop there and board the first freight train going our way.

A saddle, fancy or otherwise, is made to fit the back of a horse. It is possible to transport it in that manner from place to place without any noticeable discomfort to the rider. But, wrapped up in a grain sack and flung over a man's shoulder, the cantleboard bumping the small of his back at every step, it is turned into an instrument of torture. We had been informed that it was three miles to the crossing. Slim had elected himself to play pack-horse the first mile and a half, then I was to take over his duties to our point of destination. When he turned his precious load over to me, I was satisfied that the distance covered had been a mile and a half. In fact I secretly nursed an idea that he had cheated himself and gone farther than he was supposed to.

A man walking on a railroad track, wearing a pair of high-heeled boots, his mind set on missing the depressions between the ties, is no judge of distance. But after stumbling and limping over several millions of additional ties, my suspicions became aroused. My right arm was numb, my back sore, my shoulder stiff, my left leg which had been broken began to drag painfully, and to add to my almost intolerable discomfort I developed a ravenous appetite.

Nevertheless I continued on my way resolved not to give up. Undoubtedly my turn would come. Denver was far away and there would be other packing expeditions. Revenge would be sweet!

AT last the crossing was reached and we settled down to wait for our westbound freight. The hours dragged, the night became dark—and silent and cold. My appetite increased to a point where a boiled prairie owl would have seemed a delicacy. I shook the last of my tobacco into a cigarette paper and clumsily rolled a smoke with numbed fingers, only to find I had no match. Right then and there I rose on my hind legs and cussed. I cursed the community, the county, the state we were in, the railroad (for not sending relief). I cursed Slim for not getting bucked off and last, but thoroughly and convincingly, I cursed the White Elephant.

My partner lay in the cinders and laughed and after I quieted down, he painted a picture of the celebration we would put on after selling our saddle. One thousand dollars' worth of cowboy enjoyment! And as I listened I cinched my belt tighter and fell asleep.

A distant rumbling sound awakened me and raising myself on my elbow, I saw Slim also awake and getting to his feet.

The headlight glare of a locomotive was approaching from the direction of Green City. We picked up our saddle and crouched in the protecting shadows of the grade. The engine passed our place of concealment and the train came to a grinding stop in front of us. We rose hastily and Slim carrying the saddle we ran along the stalled cars until we reached the welcoming open door of an empty box-car. I jumped in first, Slim handed me his burden and followed me inside. The engine gave two long whistles, our car shot ahead like a bronk out of a chute, stopped suddenly and unexpectedly, started once more and eased into a slow rumbling forward motion, increasing in speed at every turn of the wheels. We were going west.

WE made few stops; we had been lucky enough to mount a through freight, but after a few hours of steady traveling we came to a division point and there changed engines. The brakemen walked back and forth past our open door carrying lanterns but we hid in the darkness and were not detected. At the next stop, just before the train made its first jump ahead, we heard voices outside and repaired to the darkest corner of the car. A shadow obscured the open door for a moment and disappeared inside; another followed. We were no longer alone.

We slid down to a sitting position without making a sound; as long as it was dark we would not be seen and we did not crave the company of doubtful strangers. But when one of them lit a match and held it to a cigarette in his mouth, when the odor of burning tobacco reached my nostrils, I could no longer be held back; I would smoke too. I glanced at my partner. He had fallen asleep. I stumbled forward and reaching the smoker I greeted him: "Howdy!"

No doubt my friends thought they were alone in the car and my unexpected appearance was a complete surprise to them. They got up to see me better; one lit a match and held it in my face. This act also gave me a full view of their features and it may be what they intended doing. They were both very tough-looking gents.

"Cowboy, huh!" grumbled the one of the red whiskers and the greasy cap pulled over his eyes. "Where you goin'?" I explained that I was headed for Denver to a rodeo. Then I made my request for a smoke. The shorter bum handed me a fresh pack of cigarettes, a thing uncommon among knights of the smoky trail.

The short fellow, in an unconcerned sort of a way, began wandering back and forth in the car, until his foot came in contact with the sack containing the White Elephant. He dragged it into the light of the door. "Whatcha got there, Bub?" he asked of me, suspiciously prodding the

bundle with a dirty finger. The other bum, drawn by the scent of plunder, opened a murderous-looking knife and made to slit the cloth.

"Partner," I said calmly, "when you mess with that package, you are inviting a large flock of trouble to rush your way. Take my friendly advice and leave it alone."

The man with the knife straightened up and advanced toward me. "Oh, come on," he said soothingly. "We don't want all you got, pardner, we just want to split with you. Don't we, Bill?" His voice was calm, he continued advancing, all the while pouring a stream of aimless chatter. He reminded me of a man walking up to a horse with a hand full of grain extended in front of him and a bridle behind his back. In this case the bridle was a knife.

Then I detected a movement in the opposite end of the car. Slim was awake and coming to the rescue. I retreated slowly, getting set for action. The other bum was still by the door watching intently for signs of conflict. A shape loomed up into the uncertain light by his side. Slim crouched for a second, then driving with all his power caught Mr. High-Jack flush on the jaw. The punch was well aimed and, taking effect on relaxed muscles, was a perfect success. I had a fleeting glimpse of a pair of feet disappearing out of the door, and Slim was standing alone.

Red, hearing the sound of a hard fist striking flesh, glanced around to see the cause of the disturbance. I naturally took advantage of this opportunity to plant a boot-heel in his stomach. He fell back gasping into Slim's windmill-like attack. In due time he rejoined his partner, or at least we hoped he did, later. Investigation disclosed the presence of a stack of sandwiches wrapped in a newspaper left behind by our friends in their hurry to depart. Our train rolled on and we disposed of the welcome and unexpected lunch. The White Elephant had been saved to us, but I remonstrated with Slim for not obtaining the pack of cigarettes before he ushered the short gent outside.

DAYLIGHT, the second day out, brought disaster in the shape of a hard-boiled brakeman. We lost passage on our west-bound freight. We could have mounted another soon after, but we decided this would be a good chance to vary our diet, which had consisted mainly of coal-dust and fresh air.

It was evident that we had not gone far enough west for our big hats to cease causing comment. The natives of the village now honored by our visit regarded us in a doubtful and critical manner. It would be safe to bet that the city marshal was informed of our arrival before we had covered two blocks. To the best of our ability we had tried to remove the stains of travel from our persons; the water trough at the stock pens had served the purpose. But nothing short of a complete change of clothing would have taken from us the particular appearance of free passengers. Slim's California pants had lost, in transit, their iron-like stiffness; now they hung in folds and wrinkles, revealing to all the world the most freakish pair of bowed legs this side of Cheyenne.

The brilliant and admirable luster of his pink silk shirt had somewhat rubbed off and taken on a kind of a purplish hue which would have been equally pleasing to the eye had it not caused a spotted effect which was altogether disreputable. Closer inspection would have disclosed a distinct high-water line on his neck and his funnel-like ears had gleaned a considerable amount of cinders which filled them to overflowing.

FAR be it from me to insinuate that he looked worse than I did. Side by side we made a well-matched pair—birds of a feather, as it were.

The village boasted of two restaurants where nourishment could be obtained—at prices duly and plainly registered on bill of fares and menus. No bargains or reductions were offered that day, and upon our humble request for sadly needed subsistence, one hard-hearted proprietor went so far as to point to a sign hung on the cash register to the effect that he (the proprietor) had made arrangements with the bank whereby he was to make no loans and the bank to sell no soup.

The future looked dark and forbidding. The White Elephant became heavier as time passed and we laid it on the sidewalk, sat down on the curbing on each side of it and opened a conference for the immediate relief of the present situation, which had become desperate indeed. Our journey had come to an end. We were at a standstill—all but our stomachs, which were traveling furiously toward a given

On passing a newsstand we stopped to buy the latest number of the Billboard. A few minutes later—

point called Starvation. It felt as though this organ was turning hand-springs, while malignant little devils busied themselves tying knots into our intestines. I recollected the saying of one cowboy who claimed that he had once grown so hungry that his larger entrails had begun eating the smaller ones. I wondered how long it would be before this phenomenon took place inside of me, and if it would bring a noticeable relief.

These unhappy thoughts were intruded upon by the sudden appearance of a form in front of us inquiring: "Can you ride pitchin' hosses?" Yes, we could, and would; for a small consideration sufficient to procure two meals, we would gladly attempt to ride any horse, mule, cow-critter, antelope, buffalo or, these being not available, any animal under the living sun that the gentleman could produce.

"Shore," said the stranger. "I wouldn't expect you fellers to do it for nawthin'." He shifted a large chew from one side of his mouth to the other and continued, "Fact is, I aint got no idea this here mule of mine'll buck any. But he's tore up two sets of harness and he's a plumb son-ovagun to handle. It'd be a pleasure to me to see somebody ride his tail off."

"What would you give for a right good job of tamin' that outlaw mule of yores?" asked Slim in an expectant voice.

"Wa-all," answered the stranger, performing another rapid shift of his quid, "you boys'll find that we'uns hereabouts is perty good sports. We like our fun as well as most folks and better than some. Furthermore, we pay for what we git and aim for other people to do the same." (We had, earlier in the day, learned the truth of that statement.) "I'll round up a gang of fellers from around town and tell 'em to gather at the stockyards, by the depot. You be thar and I'll fetch my mule. We'll take up a collection amongst us and if you ride him all right you git every cent of it. How's that? Fair enuff?" He struck a jovial attitude, flooded the gutter with a veritable downpour of tobacco juice and waited expectantly for our answer.

Slim regarded me doubtfully and said: "Kin we do it? I mean in this shape and all?"

I WAS not fully convinced myself that we could successfully accomplish the riding of Mr. Spendthrift's mule, in our present state of starvation. But prospects of credit were slim and, after all, this was a chance to eat, if not right away, in the near future—and we had no other expectations.

I made up my mind at once. "I'll ride your mule, Mister," I stated shortly. Rising from the sidewalk in a dignified sort of fashion to hide my true feelings,

I headed for the stock pens, leaving Slim to follow haltingly in my wake, him carrying the White Elephant.

After a few minutes the sports began to arrive. They came singly and in groups. It was a cause of surprise to me to see what a crowd flocked to the entertainment on such short advertising. Surely from a gathering of that scope the collection would be ample enough to pay our fares to Denver, with enough left over for entrance fees in the bronk riding. Our friend appeared on the scene, leading from a hat-rack of a saddle-horse the long-eared fiend that I had agreed to ride.

While the gate was being opened to admit his entrance, I felt a gentle touch on my shoulder and, turning around, I was confronted by a florid-faced individual smiling in a friendly way.

"Don't want a drink, do you? Afore you mount that there hellion?" He lightly tapped a bulge in his coat pocket and winked knowingly.

A friend in need! An oasis in the desert! A man of sterling qualities in a sea of indifferent, worthless nobodys! I took—no, I grabbed—the proffered bottle and drained it to the last drop. My astonished benefactor, sorry now for his generosity, gasped a couple of times, backed slowly away and exclaimed:

"Wa-all! I'll be blowed!"

The stuff was home-made but exceedingly potent. It shot down my throat like a streak of fire, splashed to the bottom of my empty stomach and exploded immediately. I leaped for the center of the corral and yelled:

"Where's that mule?"

SLIM, unaware of my condition, and thinking that I had gone loco from privation, advanced toward me with the intention of attempting to quiet me. But, six feet away, he was caught full in the face by an odor which, although familiar, was unexpected. He stopped, regarded me darkly and said:

"Where is it?"

"Slim, old boy," I answered lightly, "there aint no more. There wasn't much to start with, and I figured I'd need it to get this job done properly."

The mule was snubbed to the saddle-horse and a surcingle had been cinched on him. I buckled on an old cheap pair of spurs borrowed from some one in the crowd and advanced toward my victim (?) My feet did not feel contact with the ground. I did not walk; I floated. I grasped the hand-holds of the rigging and attempted to mount, but it seemed I had as many legs as a cockroach and that each one insisted in getting in the other's way, so that mounting was rendered almost impossible. With the help of two scared but willing farmers, I finally got a leg on each side. The audience took for the fence.

I let out a long-drawn-out war-whoop and, not waiting to utter the usual "Turn him loose!" I stuck both spurs into the neck of my extremely nervous mount, which promptly turned itself loose, upsetting both saddle-horse and rider in the process.

FROM then on the action became too fast and too violently furious to be described in details. I felt myself slipping from side to side, clawing frantically first with one spur, then with the other. My grip on the surcingle never relaxed for one instant, but at times both my legs stuck straight out behind me in an horizontal position. A sober man would have been bucked off at the third jump, but I was far from being sober. That one drink of moon on a stomach absolutely devoid of solid matter had given me, for a time, the strength of three men and a complete immunity from punishment.

"Who-o-o-ope-e-e!" My mule leaped once more high into the air, but instead of coming down with it as I had succeeded in doing up to this time, I kept sailing for the clouds, curved gracefully above the corral and began a descent toward the ground, in the manner of a duck full of buckshot. However, an empty wagon—of the variety used for gathering corn, with a high sideboard on one side—happened suddenly between me and terra firma, and I hung there like a wet towel thrown carelessly over the edge of a bath-tub.

The mule, not to be outdone in this fence-vaulting contest and feeling considerably lighter since my departure from its back, plowed its way through a row of fascinated spectators. But having misjudged the height of the inclosure, the now frantic animal was caught by the top plank of the corral, between flanks and hind legs, and it also hung there, screaming and kicking furiously in a vain endeavor to free itself from the most unusual position it had ever found itself in.

Men scrambled madly for a safer location. The owner of the mule and promoter of this highly pleasing form of entertainment, forgetting everything but the safety of his beast of burden, jumped the fence and grabbed the animal's halter, attempting with vigorous pulling and descriptive cussing to pull it down from its precarious situation. In this attempt he was more successful than he really intended to be. One kick, more violent than the rest, suddenly freed my late mount, which landed square on top of its master, knocking all the wind out of him.

Having attained liberty, the mule decided not to lose it again right away, and the last I saw of it, it was bucking and running toward open country, taking along a clothes-line fully loaded with sheets, pillow-cases and various objects of wearing apparel, the whole flapping gently behind like the tail of a comet.

THE cause of my unscheduled flight was not long unexplained; in each hand I still held with a death-grip to a ragged piece of leather that had been my only means of support in riding a loose-hided mule.

After getting my legs under me and onto solid ground once more, I made this fact plain to the crowd and the collection was handed to me without any objections. It had been taken up in my hat and when it changed hands a pleasing clinking sound was heard. I shoved the hat to Slim and said:

"Here, you count it. I feel kinda dizzy." The whisky had worn off and the old hunger returned in all its agony. Slim emptied the contents of the hat on the ground and we stared at them goggle-eyed.

"The blankety blanked Ethiopian, carrion-eatin'—"

This from Slim, and a whole lot more. I gazed dumbly at the vanishing crowd of sports, glanced again at our collection and added a few descriptive and colorful adjectives of my own.

There, on the ground, lay the proceeds of a piece of work which had almost been the cause of another trip to the hospital for me. Pennies; and here and there, a few lonely nickels shining brightly like flashes of gold at the bottom of a miner's pan. In all there was seventy-six cents!

But this meant food, and we were desperately hungry. We grabbed the White Elephant between us and ran for the nearest restaurant.

Five days later we arrived in Denver, still dragging with us a bulging grain-sack that had become frayed, greasy and black with soot.

During these five days, in fact, we had met with enough adventures to make up a full book-length novel entitled "Hard Luck." We were kicked bodily off freight trains, walked long miles through hostile country, had been chased by man-hating, blood-thirsty dogs. We had stolen garden stuff, raided chicken nests and roosts; in one instance we had been shot at—and hit with a double load of birdshot. But at last we had reached a market place for our burden. We no longer regarded the White Elephant as a blessing or something to be proud of. We hated it bitterly for all the discomforts and privation it had brought upon us. We wanted to sell it, sell it quickly, and forget we ever had owned it. The rodeo was over, the contestants gone to other shows and so we could no longer gamble on help from that source.

We walked from the freight yards to the stockyards, drawing looks of pity, irony, contempt, doubt and criticism. Indeed, we looked bad and it was a wonder that we were not arrested on suspicion during our walk across the metropolis.

The stockyards employ a large number of men that are required to use saddle horses, and consequently saddles. Some of these men are wealthy: commission men, stock buyers, inspectors and ranchers. To one of these we intended selling the White Elephant. We felt entirely confident that we would not encounter any trouble in disposing of it at once.

WE soon learned that no one desired a thousand-dollar saddle. In the first place, it was a trick riding-saddle—no swells in front of it—no one cared for it only a trick rider, and no trick rider was to be found. In the second place, it had too much silver on it—to be torn off by straining ropes or half-opened gates. In the third place, it was too heavy. And last but not least, it was too expensive! It looked as though we would have to go through the rest of our natural lives dragging behind us a heavy good-for-nothing silver-decorated White Elephant, jump off and on speeding freight trains, starve and miss rodeos.

No sir! We would throw the blamed thing in the river first, and this we decided to do that same night. Besides, we would take great pleasure in doing it. The splash would be music to our ears.

THIS was not to be, however; the White Elephant was not due for such a fate. A stockyards cowboy who knew about our situation and had staked us to the price of several meals showed us a way whereby we could probably dispose of the saddle at a profit.

"Why don't you boys go to old man Wolfson?" said our benefactor. "He sells stuff for us hands when we get broke, chaps, saddles, spurs and the like. He knows where to sell it, him bein' acquainted with everybody connected with this outfit. He charges one-third of the sale for his commission, but you boys'll never get rid of this kyack nohow, a-tryin' to peddle it yoreselves."

We welcomed the suggestion and inquired our way to Mr. Wolfson's place of business. There we found a conglomeration of broken-down saddles, six-shooters, watches, Indian bead work and some articles of clothing.

"Wot!" says he. "A nickel-plated saddle, and you want I should sell it!" We informed him it was silver, not nickel. "Well, then, a silver-plated saddle—maybe it is silver! Anyway, nickel looks better. And who you think I should sell it to? I ask you between me and you who you think would be crazy enough in the head to buy it? Tell me that! No! You can't!" He regarded the White Elephant with a critical eye, then entered into a long discourse having to do with the lack of common-sense displayed by cowboys that bought fancy articles at fancy prices, then wanted him, Old Man Wolfson, to stick them onto some unsuspecting person so that they could obtain money to purchase other worthless do-dads. However, he would try to do this thing for us. Nobody else would he do it for, you understand. But for us, all right, he would rack his brains, work night and day until he would maybe suffer a nervous break-down. But the saddle would be sold. His commission would only be one-third of the money obtained.

WE agreed to this, walked out of the store and wandered up and down the streets until evening. Then we came back to learn if a sale had been made. What did we think, anyway? That people wanting nickel-plated saddles were as thick on the streets as fleas on a dog's back? If we thought that, why didn't we sell it ourselves? We retreated, two beaten men.

That night we slept in a manger full of hay, keeping hungry cattle from their last meal regardless of their protesting bawls. The next morning we secured two hours of work cleaning stock-pens; at noon we ventured again to Old Man Wolfson's shop, only to be almost thrown out. For three days we lived this way; but on the evening of the third day, despair in our hearts, our heads hanging low and our boot heels dragging in a dejected fashion, we entered the store and were not chased out. The White Elephant was missing from its peg.

It had been sold this same day to a shipper of cattle with more money than good sense for the fabulous sum of $187.50. It had taken a great deal of persuasion and sale talk, insisted our agent, but it had been done and a hundred and twenty-five ($125.00) of it was ours. We almost fainted. At last we were free. We went out dancing and whooping with joy. Now for a real feed, and clean clothes, and a bath, and afterward.

BUT an unwelcome agent had to appear for the special purpose of completely ruining our happiness. The Ghost of the White Elephant was to haunt us forever. It would show itself in the dead of night to laugh and sneer at us. We would repeatedly see it in the daytime, the sun shining on its silver mountings, and it would laugh—and other folks would laugh, too; that was the hell of it!

Bent on obtaining food of quality we rushed madly down the street; but on passing a newsstand we stopped to buy the latest number of the *Billboard* so we could get in touch with the rodeo world. A few minutes later, sitting in a restaurant, we had come upon an advertisement reading as follows:

SLIM PARKINS! ! !

Upon seeing this ad you are requested to get in touch with the Manley Saddle Company, 1244 Lorimer Street, Denver, Colorado. We will give you $1,150.00 for the saddle you won at Green City, Ark. We need it badly to fill a rush order from Hollywood. PLEASE ANSWER THIS AD AT ONCE! ! ! !

Undercurrents

By

CULPEPER ZANDTT

Illustrated by Joseph Sabo

That venturesome American physician Dr. Galt again puts over a hazardous exploit in a remote corner of the Orient. One of Mr. Zandtt's best stories.

IT was Colonel Gillespie of the Governor's Staff—one of the most efficient men in the Indian Secret Service—who proposed the combined hunting and botanizing trip up the Peninsula. His idea was to go by steamer to Penang and then trek over through the northern part of Perak. But when he suggested this to Galt, the Doctor smiled.

"If hunting is your only object, old chap, I dare say you'd get quite a bag and plenty of excitement in that neighborhood," he remarked. "But if, as I suspect, the trip isn't altogether a rest-cure, it might be well to remember that even the non-federated States are fairly well under observation. The sultans know that if the Residents aren't heard from during a certain length of time, an expeditionary force is likely to come nosing up for a look-see and explanations. Of course they're in touch with anything going on up the Peninsula, beyond them, and doubtless would side with the other brownies if ever there's a prospect of concerted action among 'em. But the little sultanates north of Perlis are where they discuss such matters openly—and where you're likely to find white trouble-makers on the job, if that's really what you're looking for. Conditions there are rudimentary outside of the kampongs around the sultans' palaces—but if you don't mind roughing it, I'd say you'll pick up a good bit of information before coming out again—if you *do* come out!"

"Faith, I believe you're quite right in what you say, Galt!" the Colonel agreed. "Of course it's understood that I'm merely goin' up for a bit of rest from my Staff duties, d'ye see—but that's not sayin' I expect to be asleep most of the time, y'know. Very good! Would you be inclined to take me on—for such a trip as you suggest?"

"Well, yes. My China boy, Ling Foh, picked up a rumor from some of his own people that two white men—nationality

not known—have been trekking around up there; also a white woman with a couple of shikaris and an outfit of bearers is said to be hunting along the foot of the mountains accompanied by another woman—younger and very much tanned —who may be European or Eurasian. The women aren't thought to know either of the white men or anything about them, and may be on a *bona-fide* hunting-trip, though it's not a locality usually picked out for that sort of thing, and the men may be scientists, but somehow I don't believe either supposition."

FIVE days after leaving Singapore, accompanied by the Colonel's "boy" and Galt's servant Ling Foh, they were trekking along the base of the mountain-range with eight bearers whom they had picked up in Old Kedah, in a little sultanate north of Perlis. Gillespie and the Doctor were in hammocks slung from poles carried by four bearers; they were wearing merely singlets, khaki "shorts" above leather-puttees, and solar topees. One night they had spent in the jungle, in a nipa-hut supposed to be haunted by devils, another in a small Malay village, and were counting upon a dak bungalow in another kampong half a day from the Sultan's capital-town.

Both knew very well that reports of them would be conveyed to the Sultan in advance of their arrival, and Galt had some idea that he would be represented as a personage in spite of his rough appearance, for Ling Foh harbored a conviction that his "Tuan Hakim" was actually a member of the Great *Tong*—that dread and all-powerful benevolent society which is said to control all other *tongs* of whatever description not only in China but pretty much throughout the Far East where other brown races affiliate more or less with the Chinese.

Galt had once shown a friend of mandarin rank a cube of the finest ivory with a Chinese ideograph inlaid in gold upon one of its faces—which Galt had taken from the body of a plague victim in the jungle upon a certain occasion. He asked how much risk he ran in keeping the thing about him, and the mandarin—knowing through his underground channels that the Doctor had saved the lives of many Chinese in the Philippines, and knowing him to be a scientist with extensive acquaintance among influential Orientals—said he would advise certain members of the Great *Tong* that Galt had the symbol, and place him more or less under the protection of that organization; an action for which Galt had been extremely thankful upon more than one occasion.

From the time they came ashore at Old Kedah, therefore, Gillespie had noticed the marked respect with which all of the natives treated Galt—and was much puzzled to account for it. Evidently the Doctor had far more influence among the Malays, Tamils and Chinese than anyone in the Straits supposed.

They reached the dak bungalow just as the sun disappeared, fortunately—the jungle being no place to camp for the night unless one has had time to cut a small clearing in the undergrowth—and learned that another white man was expected on his way to a Siamese kampong east of the mountain-range—which he hoped to reach next day, with luck.

In half an hour, the man—a burly fellow—appeared. He was noticeably put out at finding others in the bungalow which he evidently had anticipated having to himself, and going to the *dato's* house while his bearers were preparing a meal for him, he demanded that the strangers be lodged in one of the nipa huts for the night—saying he was a friend of the Sultan's and preferred having the bungalow to himself. To his amazement, however—for he was fairly certain that the *dato* knew he had been staying at the palace—the Malay chief positively refused to disturb the other whites. He added that the Sahib Frascani could have a nipa hut for himself if he preferred, but that there was plenty of room in the bungalow for all three.

Frascani began to wonder who the strangers might be, and from his point of view, it was decidedly his business to find out. He didn't attempt to disguise his feeling that they had no business in the bungalow—but he made a grudging attempt at civility. After the others had eaten a dinner prepared by their servants, he asked if they were hunters.

Galt had been covertly studying him with considerable interest—and now he smilingly replied:

"One big-game hunter and one botanist, M'sieur Frascani."

"What? You know my name? I do not recall that we ever have met."

Galt was able to get the gist of what was being said around that fire, as he stood below in the darkness.

"No—but one picks up names in the gossip, here and there."

"Ah! Been pumping my servants, have you? I'll thrash them for that until they can't stand!"

"Oh, no, you wont. M'sieur Frascani is not such a fool as that," rejoined Galt calmly. "One does not abuse Malays. They all carry a kris and are familiar with every vital spot. Thrash one, and you wont dare sleep again until you're out of the country. That remark of yours was merely a gesture, of course. When two white men known as the Sahibs Taranov and Frascani remain for months in these little sultanates up the Peninsula, the Staff in Singapore naturally hears of them. Colonel Gillespie, here, is on the Staff. There's no parlor-magic in our knowing your name. Suppose you give us some idea as to the best localities for game? I heard that one of you bagged a four-hundred-pound tiger some weeks ago."

"Half-starved beast that came down to one of the kampongs for a *carabao* or anything else he could eat," growled Frascani. "There's little or no game in this neighborhood; you'll get much more by going back to Perak. In fact, my advice to you is: Get out of this country as soon as you can! I'm going across the mountains tomorrow and Taranov is following me in a day or so. There are cholera and bubonic here—"

"Yes, you'll find them in most of the native States, to a greater or less degree. By the way, Frascani—have you heard of two white women in this vicinity?"

"They're said to be hunting with two shikaris, further north. I sent word by one of the Malays that they'd better get out as soon as possible—but they'd written to the Sultan of their intention to call upon him Friday or Saturday, if they can get through by then. I wrote what the conditions were and that it was no country for white women."

THERE were a few old mildewed copies of English and French illustrated weeklies piled upon a couple of hanging shelves against one of the living-room walls, with a mine-lantern and a tin, half full of petrol, in one corner. The encouragement to sit attracting mosquitoes by trying to read was slight indeed.

But Frascani quite apparently was determined not to sleep before the other two, and grouchily seated himself at the table with some of the gazettes while the Colonel and Galt smoked outside upon the veranda, the bungalow being upon six-foot posts above the ground-level.

Presently the Doctor whispered that he was going to walk about the kampong for a general look-see, and silently disappeared in the darkness.

Here and there a dim light shone out from a nipa hut—also at some height above the ground—and in the middle of the row there was a larger fire of pitchy wood upon the mud hearth of the community-house where a number of the families lodged in stalls like those of a European stable.

As Galt had been speaking Malay and some of its dialects ever since he came out to the Orient, he was able to get the gist of what was being said around that fire, as he stood just below the platform in the darkness. There were occasional references to him as the "Tuan Hakim," and his friend, the "Tuan Gillespie," in tones of the utmost respect.

But in references to Frascani, there was no evidence of friendliness whatever. "That one," it was true, had spoken of matters which would be to their advantage if ever they came to pass—but there must be something in it for himself or he wouldn't have bothered about them. An overbearing, bragging sort of Tuan who doubtless would drive them like slaves if they made agreement to go into certain matters with him. What he suggested might be very good to bring about —if it could be done—but it had been tried before with disastrous results. True, much could be accomplished if all the brown people stood together and agreed to accept orders from those in command, but how many would make such an agreement, or stick to it if they did? . . . . .

When Galt strolled back to the bungalow, he had gained some idea of what Taranov and Frascani were up to in the Peninsula sultanates, and about where they came from. If they had done any hunting at all it was merely incidental, he realized, as camouflage for their real object.

Frascani was smoking on the veranda as Galt came up the steps, and his manner was little short of insulting.

"Haven't you sense enough, Galt, to know that even Malays don't walk about country like this in the dark if they can avoid it? If you happen to step on a cobra, tarantula or scorpion—that's the last of you!"

"Well, that's nobody's affair but mine, is it, Frascani? Now, see here! We were strangers until you came along this evening, and we've been as civil as we'd be to anyone we took for a gentleman. But you've been inexcusably insulting from the first moment—it's about time we had a show-down! What's your idea, anyway?"

"Hmph! If you want plain talk, you'll get it!" snarled Frascani. "This country isn't healthy for men of your breed, whether they're hunters or scientists or anything else. To put it bluntly, you're not wanted here! The Sultan doesn't want you in his territory—and you'll both get out of it in the morning if you know what's good for you!"

"Y-e-s? You're in the service of the Sultan, I suppose?"

"Put it the other way around if you like—he takes my advice in a good many matters."

"We don't believe that—and we don't admit your authority in any way whatsoever."

"Do I understand that you give me the lie?" sneered Frascani, scowling.

"Not until I've told the Sultan what you've said and heard his comments upon it—though I know what they'll be," said Galt quietly. "Not very complimentary to him, you know. See here, Frascani," he added, "for some reason, you personally don't want us here—which doesn't interest us in the least. We expect to be in the neighborhood several weeks at least. If you become too annoying, we'll simply ask the *dato* either to run you out of the country or have you permanently eliminated. It'll be done, too—you may bank on that! I don't know just what sort of men you took us for, but you seem to have miscalculated somewhere."

Frascani was speechless with rage, but a warning flash of common sense suggested more self-control. These men were not in the least afraid of him. Somehow the quiet assurance with which Galt counted upon the Malays to obey his orders made Frascani wonder who the devil they could be and how they obtained any such influence. For a few moments he considered abandoning his trip across the mountains, and hurrying back, instead, for a conference with Taranov—then he reflected that if he sent a note by a bearer it would put his companion on guard just as well.

NEXT morning he had already left when Galt and the Colonel got up for breakfast. By late afternoon they reached the little capital-town. Freshening themselves

a bit, they walked up to the palace, which was on higher ground, overlooking the kampong on the east side and giving a distant view of the Indian Ocean from its terraces.

The two white Memsahibs had come into the town that morning, they heard, and Galt had a vague hunch that the women might not be altogether the strangers they were supposed to be, as far as His Highness was concerned.

If by any chance their object in coming there were similar to that of Taranov and Frascani—or if Taranov had told some lying story to the Sultan before Galt and Gillespie reached the palace—it was quite possible that His Highness might refuse to see the latter or even order them out of his state.

So the Doctor started a little back-fire of his own.

Calling Ling Foh, he said:

"There may be this one or that one, Ling, who will poison the mind of His Highness against us if he gets the chance. Go 'long top-side—find some of your people who can get the ear of the Sultan. See that he privately understands we are not common shikaris, but men of standing and influence who wish him well, but can make trouble if we're insulted. Savvy? Can do?"

"Can do, O Tuan!"

The palace was a beautiful specimen of Saracenic architecture in marble which originally had been white and was still light enough in color to stand out in sharp and graceful contrast to the dark green of the jungle on three sides of it. In front, there was the usual "tank" one hundred feet wide by two hundred feet long, varying in depth from three to eight feet, with a marble rest pavilion at each corner and a wide mosaic terrace entirely around it. Along three sides of the palace on the ground floor, ran an arcade with Saracenic arches and columns. Beyond this was a durbar-hall with a wide arched entrance through which one looked out over the tank, the kampong below, and the waving treetops of the jungle, to the glistening ocean in the distance. To the rear of the durbar-hall, stretched a marble foyer with branching stairways leading to the floor above, upon which were the Sultan's private suite, including the harem on one side with various guestrooms on the other. A large dining-hall was in the center and an arched veranda all around. Access to the flat tiled roof was obtained from the foyer—the Sultan usually spending the evenings there under a great awning. Kitchens and servants' quarters were in separate buildings behind the palace, but carried out in the same style of architecture.

AS Galt and Gillespie, dressed in the white linen suits they had brought along for such an occasion, came up the marble steps to the west end of the tank-terraces, they saw a couple of white women chatting with a man in one of the shady pavilions and would have passed with merely a courteous bow if the man hadn't stepped out to stop them.

"Doctor Galt an' the Colonel Gillespie, I theenk? Yess? We 'ave 'eard of your being in ze country—yess. Weel you not join ze ladies an' myself in ze pavilion? Hees Highness cannot be seen until after ze siesta—if one 'ave ze luck to see heem at all."

"This is M'sieur Taranov, of course—and the ladies, Madame Delaunay, with her friend Ma'mselle Crassin? We'd heard of you, just as you heard of us. Ladies, this is very pleasant, even if it's not the sort of country where white women are altogether safe."

"But, m'sieur, we have been here, in one place or another, for nearly a month—and nothing unpleasant has happened to us beyond the usual risks of hunting big game!"

"And what big game have you bagged, madame—if one may ask?" inquired Colonel Gillespie.

"Oh, we have two or three very good skins, and that of a twenty-foot snake which will look quite horrible when stuffed. So far, it has been a little disappointing, but we're by no means through yet. Fortunately, we met His Highness in Paris, and we are invited to stay here indefinitely as his guests. M. Taranov has business interests with him. Frankly, you know, His Highness is very much prejudiced against all white visitors whom he doesn't know quite well. In fact, I don't mind putting up a bit of a wager that he'll not grant you even an interview. He may permit your staying a few days in the dak bungalow down in the kampong, but if it's longer than that, he's capable of ordering you out of his State. That's why I suggested M. Taranov's stopping you before anything unpleasant happened up at the palace."

"Madame overlooks the possibility that we also may know His Highness," remarked Galt.

"No, I don't. We asked him when we came in this morning. Of course he'd been told when you crossed the border down there. He said he didn't know you."

"H-m-m—and your wager, madame? How much were you thinking of putting up against the possibility of our being received upon equal footing with yourselves?"

"Oh—shall we say a hundred rupees? Two hundred?"

"Make it three hundred, if you like."

"Done! Shall we let M. Taranov hold the stakes?"

"No. I'll hand mine over to the Sultan himself, and you can give him yours—which he will pass over to me. Until then, my word is as good as my coin, and I assume that yours is also, madame."

As they were chatting, an officer of the Sultan's bodyguard, in a smart military uniform, came deliberately down the steps of the palace arcade and along the mosaic terrace to the pavilion—where he salaamed to Galt and started to give, in badly garbled French, some message from His Highness. Madame Delaunay interrupted with a very free translation to the effect that the visitors were permitted to use the dak bungalow for three days only, and—

But the Doctor smilingly stopped her with a question to the officer in fluent Malay. An expression of relief and pleasure came over the native's face. He repeated the real message he had been sent to deliver—which was that His Highness would receive the Most Honorable Tuan Hakim and his friend, the Tuan Gillespie, in the durbar-hall at once—in a private interview. The women and Taranov had risen to accompany the visitors, but when they heard this they resumed their seats with the best grace they could muster—saying that the officer's French had been very difficult to understand.

As the two followed the officer along the terrace Colonel Gillespie grinned to himself over Galt's forethought in sending Ling Foh ahead of them to create the proper atmosphere. But for that, he knew very well that they would have been bluffed out of the Sultan's territory without a chance for explanation. He was still mystified over the influence Galt seemed to wield over the Orientals—he simply couldn't account for it from anything he knew of the American Doctor or the character of the natives. He had supposed a probability that his position on the Governor's Staff in the Straits would be known to the Sultan—but if it was, he seemed to be considered negligible in relation to his companion.

WHEN they were ceremoniously ushered into the durbar-hall, chairs were placed for them on the *musnud* by the side of His Highness, who greeted them pleasantly in sufficiently good English to carry on the conversation. Hamid Ibrahim, as they knew, was at this time about twenty-six years of age. He had been educated in Paris, as had his father. As he was honorary lieutenant colonel of a French regiment and member of a Sorbonne Société, he sometimes wore handsome, well-cut uniforms—but was usually dressed as they saw him in the Malay costume of State, consisting of tight-fitting trousers of purple satin, tied around the ankles, a tight-fitting satin monkey-jacket coming to the waist only and heavily embroidered in gold—the Mohammedan tarboosh and tassel as headgear, with a hundred-carat diamond fastened in the front of it—purple silk socks from Paris and morocco-leather slippers with upturned points. Neither his father nor his grandfather had gone as far as socks, but the younger man had made that concession to Western ideas. Underneath the monkey-jacket, he wore a shirt of pale yellow crepe-de-chine and a wide cummerbund of heavier silk in which were stuck the customary two krisses, sharpened to a razor-edge, which had a wave-line instead of a straight one.

"The Tuans' arrival was reported to me when cross my border from little kampong in Perlis—but I not know *what* Tuans until my Vizier tell me, two hour' back," he remarked pleasantly. "Have been much annoy' by some white Tuans since death of my honorable father and do not weesh to bother with common kind, but honorable Tuan Hakim and hees frien' are diff'rent kind. I make mos' welcome in my State. I consider such Tuans my guest'—to live mos' comfortable here in my palace for so long as weesh to stay. If shikari—I provide bearer' an' beater'—any time. If honorable Tuans of science, I provide asseestance in whatever research or collecting they weesh. My people are instruct' already to be mos' respectful and helping."

"This is exceedingly kind of Your Highness—we appreciate the honor you confer

upon us," replied Galt, in such fluent Malay that an expression of pleased surprise came into the young Sultan's face. "Colonel Gillespie is on the Governor's Staff at Singapore," he continued, "but in my professional capacity I ordered him away for a much-needed rest, and he hopes to bag a tiger or two with any other big game we happen to find. As for myself, I'm something of a botanist—as a medical man should be—and am interested in getting specimens of certain plants which have medicinal value—possibly making some field-tests with them. We really had no idea of imposing upon Your Highness by making any such lengthy stay in your palace as you suggest—but we'll be pleased to do so if you really wish it. And I might look round a bit among your people and see what I can do if there appears to be any serious disease in the kampong.

"There is one matter which we both regret—and for which we are not in the least responsible. Your guest, M'sieur Frascani, was rather abusive at the little kampong where we spent the night—told us to get out of the country or you would have us put out—said that you followed his advice in such matters if not actually took orders from him. Just now the two ladies and M'sieur Taranov attempted to send us away before we had a chance to pay our respects to you. We know of no way in which we can have given offense to these guests of yours and are willing to meet them halfway in establishing pleasant relations—or even making suitable apology if you can ascertain their reason for disliking us."

An expression of intense annoyance came into the Sultan's face. Both those men and the women, soon after their arrival, had taken too much for granted; they had assumed that they stood sufficiently close to give the young ruler considerable unasked advice concerning the general unrest throughout the Orient, of which he knew vastly more than they did.

"One moment, madame! You 'ave already taste' ze wine—permit that I fineesh ze glass!"

"Honorable Tuans—there are sometime' frien's who too much count upon frien'ship—advice-giving when not asked. Such people superiority assume of white race over brown an' yellow races, treating those darker peoples like children, which is mos' offensive to darker peoples. Those women—madame an' ma'mselle—I meet in Paris. They say they come my country some day. I say my country much honor'—my palace having room for their accommodate. They say madame is great shikari. I say plenty tiger, leopard, antelope, beeg snake in my country. They come thees morning—I make welcome as per contract. They tell me what I mus' do—what mus' not do. I say 'yes'—'no'—'really!'—an' am much surprise'. They say other white peoples should not be allow' in my country—I say I not allow, excep' frien's. M'sieur Tara-

nov say beeg revolution soon come an' I mus' stan' weeth native peoples. I ask where he mus' stan'? He say that weel all be arrange' afterward. Me—I am accustom' at ze Sorbonne to preserve open min'. I hear—I consider—I discuss all kinds question'. So I say to you, Honorable Tuans: You as much my frien's as those men an' women. You understan', no matter what they say—they 'ave not ze leetlest power in my State to say who mus' come or go, or what mus' they do."

"That is exactly how we thought Your Highness would look at it when we told Frascani his orders didn't interest us. Very good! Let us forget any unpleasantness and speak of other things. We heard in Singapore that Your Highness had brought home a small camera from France, and had become much interested in taking pictures, but were sending your films to Singapore for developing and printing. So, on the chance that it might interest you, we fetched along a first-class professional camera with a ground-glass object-screen, tripod, three fine lenses, filters, and a developing outfit which we'll be glad to show you how to use if you'll accept the lot as a little souvenir of our visit. Our bearers are waiting down in the kampong until we ascertain what accommodations are available—so if you're really good enough to lodge us in the palace, we'll have 'em up here and get out your camera while we're stowing the luggage."

MEANWHILE there had been serious discussion in the pavilion by the tank. The women had given no indication of having known Taranov or Frascani before they met in Tok Alang. Presumably they were French, with a possible mixture of other blood in their ancestry. The men also passed as French in spite of their names. But in the discussion by the tank, an eavesdropper would have learned certain facts which all four had been careful to keep in the background and did not suppose it possible for anyone else to obtain.

"You must have been asleep, Taranov!" said Madame Delaunay sharply. "After getting Frascani's note this morning, you took measures to have those two sent out of the country, did you not? You certainly appeared confident that they would be sent away! Of course we may carry on academic discussions with His Highness, even in the presence of these men, because he's an independent ruler who doesn't give a snap for the British Raj or any other. But we can't talk to him openly about joining an Oriental confederation as we've been doing, or arrange for shipments of arms, when these English pigs are where they're sure to pick up some of it! We've got to get rid of them one way or another—it makes little difference *which* way—up here! The facts wont get out as far as the British States for a long time. Have you made any such arrangement—at all?"

"I tried to, Sophie," replied Taranov apologetically, "and I thought there'd be no difficulty. Approached one of the *datos* who doesn't particularly care for outsiders and suggested his having these Englishmen quietly knifed while in the jungle—but his eyes nearly popped out of his head. He almost turned pale with apprehension. What! Kill the honorable Tuan Hakim and his friend! What did I suppose would happen to him if he did that? What would happen to all his family? Why not try it myself? I'd better make the hundred prostrations before Allah, repeating the abject invocation, before I attempted such a thing!"

"What utter nonsense! Who is this Tuan Hakim, that he has so much influence over the brutes?"

"Cursed if I know—but the fact remains that he has it. And I'm fairly certain that if I were caught killing either of those men, I wouldn't have a head on my shoulders next morning. You might try some of the Borgia methods on them if you like!"

"Perhaps I will. I'm not going to have them around here interfering with our game—that's certain! We've had too much reason to think our propaganda is becoming effective. It certainly is in China and India. One independent sultan like Hamid Ibrahim holding out against us will arouse doubt and suspicion among twenty others. We've simply got to make him commit himself before we leave the Peninsula—as an offset to Siam. That's the worst stumbling-block in the East today. The Siamese are intensely loyal to their king—simply wont listen to any soviet talk—and the king is the sworn ally of the English. The Regent of Annam, also, will be difficult to handle. The Annamese worshiped the old emperor, and they worship his young son. And before they consider throwing off the French Protectorate, the Regent will have to be con-

vinced that any other form of government control is safer or better for the Annamese."

Ling Foh had seen the three in the pavilion and, having some notion of what they would be talking about, wanted to overhear it—but the risk of detection in crawling across that open terrace was too great, so he picked up bits of gossip around the town instead.

Next morning, Galt and the Colonel went up the mountain-slope with their bearers after game or plants, but at his own suggestion they left Ling Foh and the Colonel's boy behind—and got enough information upon their return to make them well satisfied with the proceeding. After tiffin, in the cooler arcade of the palace, they gave His Highness some lessons in photography which interested him very much. He was as pleased as a child with the exceptionally fine camera—particularly the telephoto-lens, through which he could make out on the ground-glass some of the buildings and the jetty at Naklan, twenty miles away—in fact, they could have given him nothing of a more expensive sort that would have pleased him half as well.

LATER Galt and the Colonel went up to smoke on the awning-shaded roof, which they had all to themselves for an hour with no risk of being overheard.

"Colonel," said Galt gravely after a few moments of silence, "it's just possible that we happened along at the critical moment to save that boy's life. Ling Foh has picked up enough to confirm our suspicions about those four and give me another slant of a pretty serious nature. That crowd are from Moscow, as we thought. They are stirring up native revolt throughout the East—with a few trimmings of their own. It's Madame Delaunay's idea to form a confederation of native States agreeing to raise formidable armies, drilled and commanded by Muscovites, acting in concert to throw off the foreign yoke. Each State is to be ruled by its own Sultan, Rajah or Touchan who, in turn, recognizes the authority of a Supreme Council formed of delegates from the rulers and from the European army commanders, fifty-fifty. In case any sultan decides to secede from the confederation, his State is to be confiscated and governed as territory belonging to the whole. This is to insure their all sticking together and making a success of the revolution. Of course most of the scheme appeals to every native ruler, as it would restore the entire Orient to the Orientals and abolish white rule. The sovietizing of the entire lot afterward is something the bolshevists are keeping under their hats for the present. But a good many are suspicious of the super-State controlled by this Supreme Council, half of which would be Muscovite armymen. They know the various races wont stick together in any general revolution without some such control, regardless of self-interest—and they're pretty sure that anything of the sort would make them more dependent than they are now. Yet there's little question as to the consent of a large number—which might give the others the alternative of joining or being wiped out, later. Most of the younger rulers have been educated in Europe or America—and quite a lot of them may prefer the protection of England, France and Holland to that of this questionable Supreme Council. So much for the political side of it—"

"Which we had practically discounted several days ago."

"Just so. But the more personal intrigue can't be discounted so easily. Know who the Sultan's heir-presumptive happens to be?"

"Of course! A boy of twelve—by one of the other harem women."

"Who is absolutely in the hands of his uncle—that harem woman's brother—the *dato* Abdullah Mahmoud."

"And the latter would be Regent, unquestionably, if the boy came to the *musnud*—"

"At present, all three of them are merely pensioners upon the bounty of Hamid Ibrahim. When sons are born to him in the harem, that boy, his uncle and mother, are simply out of it as far as any big pickings are concerned. You remember those plants I found in the jungle this morning and fetched back with me? The distilled juice from them is a very powerful Asiatic poison which leaves no trace in the digestive organs. In high attenuations, it is a valuable heart remedy and stimulant. In tincture, it acts like a delayed fuse—no effect whatever for ten or twelve hours, noticeably. Then a gradual paralysis of the heart-action sets in, with symptoms of acute indigestion (which in nine cases out of ten is merely overloading

the stomach until more pressure is brought to bear upon the heart-action than it will stand). The victim dies from natural causes, as far as any autopsy will show, the poison being entirely vegetable. Well —Abdullah Mahmoud, who would become the actual ruler of Kaopung if anything happens to the Sultan before heirs are born to him, was hobnobbing with Madame Delaunay shortly after her arrival yesterday. He has had several conferences with Frascani and Taranov—and he was out botanizing in the jungle yesterday morning. Fetched in half a dozen plants. Ling Foh managed to steal one of them and fetched it to me. Same identical plant as those I got this morning! What's the answer?"

"My wŏrd!" ejaculated Gillespie. "I've seen things of the sort happen at native courts, of course—usually with stuff that works instantly. But it's a bit sickening, just the same. Is there any antidote?"

"That's what I hope to discover. On general principles, I'd give the victim phosphorus or some other heart-depressant, if I knew in time—but it's doubtful if they'd offset the poison. Abdullah Mahmoud naturally has confederates in the Sultan's household who could put that stuff in his food—but Ling Foh can obtain access to the Valide Sultana and warn her. She'll be able to look out for her son as far as the household is concerned, because it's probably ninety percent loyal to him. He's very well liked by all of the brownies—they're proud of him and his learning in addition to their hereditary allegiance. What I'm most afraid of is those damned women! They can press food and drink upon him in a way that is difficult to resist. *Psst!* Here he comes now—with his Vizier and the Valide Sultana. Ling Foh thinks the Vizier absolutely straight and intensely loyal. His fellow-countrymen may be mistaken in that estimate, but they probably aren't—because the Vizier would lose his head if Abdullah got control here."

GALT and Gillespie got out of their deck-chairs and would have retired below—but His Highness said they were welcome to use the roof at all times except when he was taking his siesta there, and he wished to chat with them.

As the young Sultan seemed interested in the Doctor's botanizing researches, Galt described their hunt that morning for certain plants and Gillespie's shooting a twenty-five-foot anaconda which his bearers were skinning for him. Taking a couple of withered leaves from the pocket of his white coat, Galt explained to the Sultan and the latter's mother the plant's medicinal and poisonous properties—running over in his mind how much it might be safe to say concerning it. But the opportunity seemed almost providential, so presently he remarked—apparently as an afterthought:

"One of your *datos*, Abdullah Mahmoud, appears to be something of a hakim and botanist also. We met him returning to the kampong this morning, an hour after we started out. One of my bearers recognized him and picked up this other leaf which fell from a bundle in his hand as he passed us. If Your Highness will compare the two leaves, you'll notice they are from the same plant. I hope the *dato* thoroughly understands what the distilled juice of these leaves will do in any human stomach—or what even chewing one of them would do. If he doesn't, somebody around here may die suddenly from what seem to be natural causes. If he does know what it will do—it is possible that he may slip it into the food of some enemy he wants to get rid of. It couldn't be either M'sieur Taranov or the ladies because he seems to be on much too friendly terms with them—all three have been in his house, talking with him. That is, I understand so from my China boy. Your Highness knows how observant such boys are."

The Sultan listened to all this in absolute silence—glancing once or twice at his mother and the Vizier in a meaning way. Galt had said nothing which might be construed as accusation—in fact, wasn't supposed to know anything of the court intrigue or the relations among the various *datos*. But his statements unquestionably were true and could be substantiated. He was the one man out of a thousand passing through Tok Alang who knew anything about the toxic properties of various plants, because his profession required knowledge of them.

"You 'ave render' great service, O honorable Tuan Hakim—perhaps intentional'—perhaps not knowing," said the young Sultan gravely.

"Will Your Highness humor me a little —as a physician who wishes for you long life? Will you find some tactful way of

A stiletto flashed in her upraised hand —but her wrist was caught from behind.

refusing to eat or drink anything offered to you by anyone—man or woman—whom you are not positive you can trust?"

"You mean—"

"Exactly what I say. Consider, Your Highness! Let us suppose a case." Galt was speaking in Malay so the Sultana and the Vizier might follow him closely. "Suppose," he continued, "that certain men and women approached you with a large and serious proposition which you thought might be dangerous in the long run. In some ways, very attractive—in others, too risky for you and your State. You do not agree at once—there is perhaps inference that you may not agree at all. But among your *datos* there are some who *would* agree if they were in your place—for a heavy bribe given them at the start. Suppose those *datos* came to a secret understanding with the men and women making the serious proposition—and actually would be placed upon the *musnud* if anything happened to you? Would those men and women be interested in having you out of the way—or not?"

"Thees case entirely supposing, Tuan Hakim?"

"Oh, quite so. I'm a Hakim—not a 'political.' Simply putting a case which from logic alone suggests but the one answer. I trust Your Highness will pardon me if I appear, through ignorance, to be speaking of matters which do not concern me in the least?"

This time, the young Sultan flashed back a reply in his own language—with his mother and the Vizier nodding emphatic agreement.

"My friend, I wish that more of those who speak to me of what does not concern them had your grasp of situations which they could not be supposed even to suspect! And I offer most sincere thanks for what you have said!"

NEXT afternoon, one of the table servants was seen dropping something into food intended for His Highness, just as he left the kitchens—and was forced to eat it himself. That evening, when dinner was served on the roof, Madame Delaunay lifted a glass of wine which had been poured for her—apparently drank a few swallows (the motions of her throat and lips were very realistic) then held the glass out to His Highness, on her right, at the head of the table:

"Will Your Highness drink with me a pledge to our friendship?"

"Madame forget," answered the young Sultan pleasantly, "—eet ees forbid' in the Koran. I am permit' a leetle wine as medicine—but no more as that. Eef madame drain the glass herself, I accep' the pledge of frien'ship. Eef not—well—what mus' I theenk?"

The woman hadn't supposed for a moment that he would refuse—when she had apparently tasted the wine first. The situation was suddenly reversed in a way which called for all the nerve and finesse she had—and for quick thinking, too. She supposed there must be an antidote—Dr. Galt, presumably, would know of something to counteract the poison from whatever symptoms she described. All this flashed through her mind in a tenth of the time it takes to write it. She bowed, and was raising the glass to her lips when Taranov, who sat at her left, interfered. Reaching out for the glass, he said:

"One moment, madame! You 'ave already taste' ze wine—permit that I fineesh ze glass to friendship weeth Hees Highness!"

As the glass was passing from her hand to his, it somehow slipped—and crashed upon the tile pavement. So that was that. Taranov immediately filled another glass and toasted the Sultan as if nothing had happened—but he fooled nobody at the table, and knew it, without in the least understanding how the Sultan could have become suspicious. Later on the three men went down to sit with madame in one of the marble pavilions by the tank while Mlle. Crassin remained chatting with Hamid Ibrahim. She was a handsome blonde, of a showy, opulent type.

Chatting upon one subject after another, she led the talk around to night-life in Paris as they both had known it, and commented upon the lack of prejudice among the French against the darker races, remarking that she had no such prejudice herself—indeed, she could easily love a man of such a race, if he cared for her, she intimated.

She talked with such apparent sincerity that His Highness was quite taken in, for a few moments. She was in his power, of course—but, it seemed to him, quite willingly. He drew her into an embrace. Then—his hand as it stole around her waist rested upon something inside her clothing which felt like a small automatic with a silencer on its muzzle. . . . . He gently withdrew his arm—and said it was time for him to retire. They went along to the stairway, chatting pleasantly—but he was half a step behind her all the way down, and he left her at the door of his suite in spite of the pouting lips which invited a good-night kiss.

WHEN the Colonel and Galt came up to their adjoining rooms—where their China boys slept upon floor-mats in one of the corners—Gillespie was frankly tired and would have turned in at once. But Ling Foh had a pot of coffee being kept hot over a little petrol-burner, and the Doctor suggested his drinking two or three cups.

"This is one of the nights we don't sleep, old chap. The beans were spilled when Madame tried to poison His Highness with that wine. Taranov managed to avert a show-down and prevent her swallowing the stuff, but nobody was fooled by it. They know the game is up as far as they're concerned and fear they may not get out of here alive unless they manage to kill him first. The Chinese and most of the natives will prevent any assistance on the Malay side or in the palace. Then the Crassin girl was supposed to exert her charms upon the Sultan—but evidently she failed of her object, for I heard her cursing her *ayah* as I passed the door. Hamid Ibrahim has a better head than I gave him credit for—for he's a hot-blooded young fellow and that girl can be rather tempting when she puts her mind on it—must have had a lot of experience, too. Possibly the first idea was for her to go into the harem and influence him to most anything from that side—but they've gone too far for that now!".

"You fancy all three may attempt gettin' into his suite during the night?", queried Gillespie.

"Not at first—too much risk of being wiped out if they're caught. I think one of the women will try to get in from one of the veranda-windows on this floor. Once inside—well—nobody'll know just exactly what happened. I say, Ling! Can you go 'long that side and attract the attention of the Sultan's boy until he opens the door of the suite a crack and whispers to you?"

"Can do."

"Maskee! Have him ask His Highness if we may come in and conceal ourselves in his room—tell him what may happen."

LING FOH accomplished his errand in the noiseless way peculiar to his countrymen, and was back in a few minutes with the desired permission. When they were inside by the Sultan's bed (which couldn't have happened if the young fellow hadn't had a Western education) he asked in a low tone what they anticipated and then told them about the automatic the girl had concealed inside her waist. It was natural enough for her to carry a weapon while traveling through such a country—but not during an evening in the Sultan's palace. They placed chairs behind the hangings of the handsome French bed, and made themselves as comfortable as possible for a long wait, but it was less than two hours when a slight noise at one of the long windows attracted their attention. The moon was now rather low in the west, and the girl's figure was silhouetted against the light as she stepped inside and tiptoed across to the bed, whispering:

"Your Highness? Your Highness! It's so hot I can't sleep! I've come in for a little chat with you!" And seating herself on the side of the bed, she prodded him with one finger until he answered.

"You little fool!" he said rapidly in French. "Don't you know that two of my guard always sleep on mats in that alcove? I've only to speak and they'll knife you without a question. It's a wonder they didn't do it as you came in!"

"Well, why don't you speak—and see what they'll do? Are you so very sure they're really here? Because, you see, they're lying out on the veranda—drugged for several hours. I didn't care to be common talk around the kampong, tomorrow. Now tell me why you were so cold and rude—up on the roof? Didn't I give you encouragement enough?"

"Too much, Ma'mselle—too much! One prefers some sport in the chase."

"You repulse me, then—when I am giving myself to you!"

"One has so many such gifts, Ma'mselle! One does not ask for them."

"Oh-h-h—you'll never insult another woman like that!"

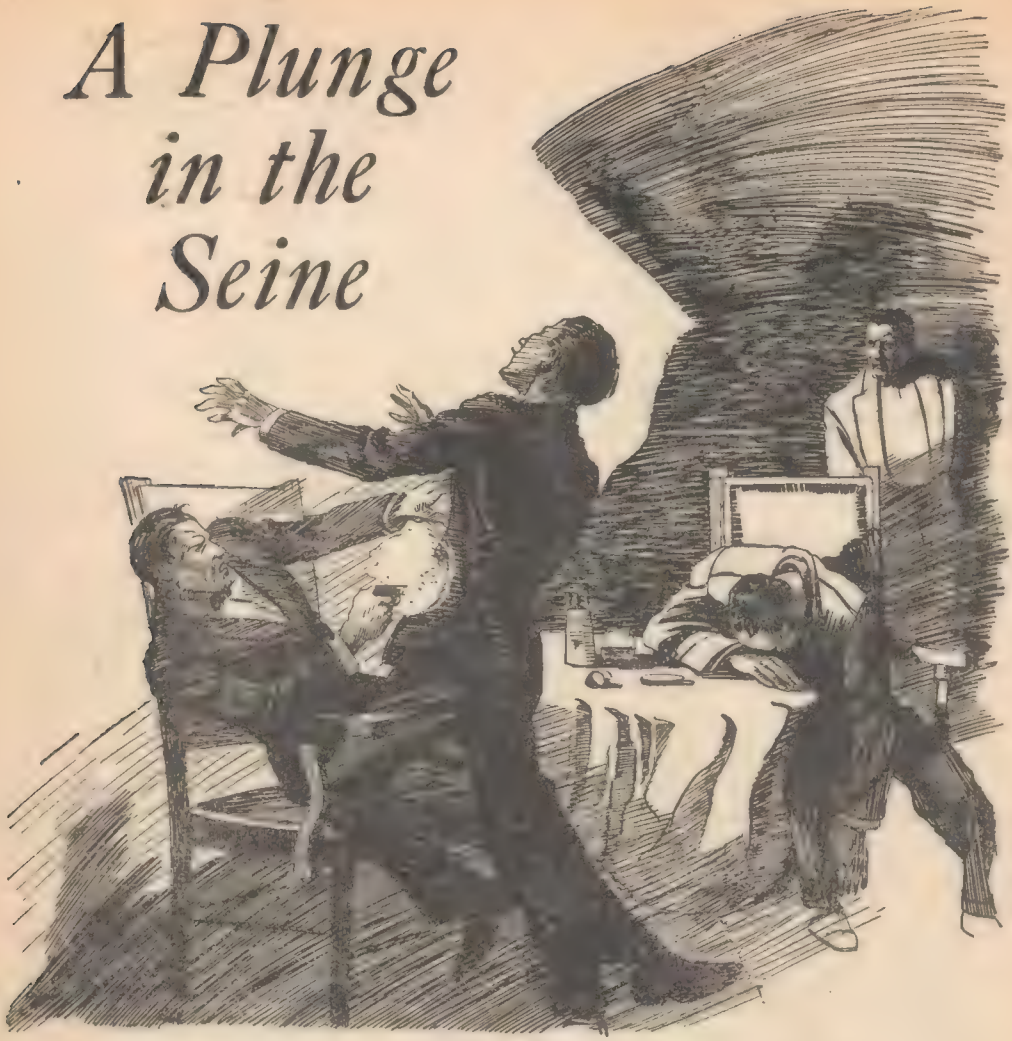
A stiletto flashed in her upraised hand—but her wrist was caught from behind and twisted until she shrieked. Then her arms and legs were tied—a wad of something stuffed into her mouth—and she was flung unceremoniously upon the floor just as two shadowy figures appeared at different windows in answer to her cry. They stepped inside—lances of flame streaking from outstretched hands directly upon the Sultan's bed, though there were merely a couple of dull coughs instead of the usual reports. Two other shots from the head of the bed, however, put a stop to that—and these were loud enough to raise the household. When the officers of the guard came running around the veranda and servants pounded upon the door of the suite, a man's body lay just inside one of the windows, and a woman's halfway out of the other. The woman was conscious and lived until morning—but the pistol in her hand, with one exploded shell, was sufficient evidence.

DESPITE Galt's precautions, the Sultan had had a narrow escape indeed—Madame's bullet having penetrated one of the pillows within an inch of his ear and that from Taranov's pistol going just over his face into the headboard. Both of the Muscovites were crack shots.

The girl was taken down to Naklan with their luggage and shipped to Singapore in the first little cargo-boat that happened along—with a warning that she would be knifed if she ever set foot in Kaopung again. Frascani found her there in one of the sailors' dance-halls at Keppel Harbor when he came down the Bangkok railway a few weeks later. As for the *dato* Abdullah Mahmoud—he was brought before the Sultan after breakfast and examined before a dozen of the loyal *datos*. Then—on the testimony of Galt and several of the Malays about the kampong—he was beheaded at the West end of the terrace where the whole town could see it done. The kitchen-servant who had been forced to eat the poisoned food died just before sunrise—with symptoms of acute indigestion, exactly as Galt had explained.

GALT and the Colonel left for Singapore a fortnight later—having had all the excitement they needed on a vacation for rest and recreation. But each of them had been asked to accept a twelve-carat ruby and several Oriental pearls of the finest luster—jewels which, in the case of each lot, would sell anywhere for twenty or thirty thousand dollars. And metaphorically, Galt and Gillespie have been presented with the keys of Hamid Ibrahim's State and may do as they please there, any time they care to!

A Plunge in the Seine



De Sarnas tried to hold my wrist, leaning over me. I shoved the little pistol against his body, heard his choking cry . . . . then everything was gone from conscious thought.

By
H. BEDFORD-JONES

This new adventure of the American who aided the French police in protecting the Legion Convention from the Apaches is exciting indeed.

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

YOU can't down an airman. Hollock was as fresh that morning as though we had never been out the night before, and cheerful to boot. I had a number of cuts where they did not show, some bruises, and felt stiff and sore, and I was not cheerful at all. I had gone home with him to his apartment in Rue de Maubeuge, and as we breakfasted, I looked out upon Paris with a sour and jaundiced eye.

"Cheer up!" said Holly. "We're off sometime today for Belgium—and we'll get our man in Bruges, thanks to what you found out last night."

I only grunted at this, and turned to the morning paper again. Neither I nor Holly were mentioned. The story was about the three Legionaries who had whipped the worst gang of knife-artists and Algerian hopheads in Paris, and for a wonder it was complimentary.

Nothing in it, either, to show that Hollock and I were at all concerned in the secret war which the government was waging on the crooks who had schemed to make money by devious ways out of the

Legion's delegates. None the less, I was worried.

"I found out where Tellier is hiding," I said, "and I also found that his gang here had been warned against us—and were planning to get rid of you at least! No telling where his precious outfit of blackmailers, assassins and plain crooks may end, either."

"Get him, and we have the gang," said Holly amiably. "And we'll get him now, thanks to you! We'd better plan on making Brussels tonight and arranging—"

His *bonne* knocked and entered. The old lady had a card in her hand, and said that a gentleman was in the hall outside. Holly tossed the card to me. It bore the name of Baron Cavaignac de Clamecy, with the insignia of several decorations; in the corner was written with pencil:

President of the Committee, Society Friends of America, to Entertain American Legion Convention.

"Tell him to wait," said Holly.

WE finished dressing, Hollock rang, and the visitor was admitted. He was Cavaignac all right—his clothes, his manners, the man himself, were distinguished. He recalled a previous meeting, and Holly nodded.

"This is a strange hour for a visit," said the Baron, who had been in the diplomatic service and spoke half a dozen languages, "but my business was pressing and important, and I was advised to see you at once. It is about the search you and Mr. Barnes are making for a man named Tellier."

Holly does not look like a war ace, an aviator who had dropped bombs over half of northern France and most of Morocco. He is slightly bald, very quiet, and wears no daredevil expression. His face now gave no hint that he was startled by these last words; nobody except Tellier himself and the Prefecture of Police knew that Holly was making any such search.

"I'm afraid I don't know what you mean," he said, looking calmly at the Baron. The latter smiled.

"I've just come from the Isle de la Citè, Mr. Hollock—from the prefecture."

"Well?" said Holly noncommittally, offering him a cigarette and lighting one.

The Baron accepted, with a shrug at the question.

"I understand," he said, with a genial air, "that Tellier is linked with what you call the underworld here; that he had mapped out a series of attempts against members of the American Legion—had selected certain men for plucking, and so forth. He's the ringleader in this. You, being an American, being in the confidence of the government and holding a French Commission in the aviation, were asked to help protect our country's guests from just such attempts. You and Mr. Barnes found out Tellier's activities, interfered, forced him to leave the country, and have been combating the activities of his agents here. Is this correct?"

"My dear Baron," returned Hollock, "let's be frank. I admit nothing."

Cavaignac laughed at this, his keen dark eyes twinkling.

"You are superb, my dear Hollock!" he said. "You should be a diplomat instead of an aviator. You wonder why I am here? Because the prefecture hinted to me that you might be interested in my story."

Holly nodded. "Perhaps. Will you do us the honor to tell it?"

"It is this. I knew Tellier during the war; he was an officer in my regiment of Spahis, and a bad fellow. Only his undoubted bravery saved him from being cashiered. Well, late last night I was leaving the apartment of a friend, in Rue George Sand—a large apartment house near Avenue Mozart. My friend accompanied me to the corner, where there is a taxi stand. As we left the entrance, which was brilliantly lighted, a man in evening dress came up, spoke to my friend, and entered. This man was Tellier. I think he did not recognize me."

HOLLY did not have a poker face for nothing. He was certainly as startled as I was at this information, but he did not show it. We knew Tellier was hiding in Belgium, and only the previous evening I had discovered where he was hiding—and then this!

"Perhaps Tellier, perhaps one who resembled him," said Hollock.

"No—pardon me! Tellier was clean-shaven in the army, and had a scar on his upper lip. Last night this scar showed clearly; nor could those oddly triangular black brows of his be mistaken. My friend said he was a man named Bergere, who lived just above him; he said Bergere had worn a mustache until lately, but had shaved it. I stated that the man was cer-

tainly Tellier. My friend has a bureau in the Department of Justice—recognized the name, stated that Tellier was being sought far and wide. He advised me to see the prefect early this morning. I did so. I was sent here. *Voilà!*"

Holly was silent for a little, his gray eyes shining softly, and I could read his thought without trouble. It was quite possible—and more probable the more we thought about it—that Tellier had never left the country at all. He might have so informed all his agents and assistants; he might have given out that he had gone to Bruges; and unknown to a soul, he might have stayed right here in Paris.

"I know your name, but not you, Baron Cavaignac," said Hollock presently. "This affair is very strange. May I have your permission to telephone M. le Prefect?"

The Baron laughed. "With the best will in the world, m'sieur!"

Holly went to the telephone, called the prefect of police—the actual ruler of Paris—and soon had that gentleman on the wire. The Baron paid no attention to what was said, but chatted easily with me, explaining casually why he was in Paris at a time when everyone who could get away was in the country.

"I may take some of your compatriots to Deauville—I have a villa there," he said. "A half-dozen guests—it would be a nice party, eh? Well, we shall see. I must remain in Paris during your convention here, for I have many things to look after; entertainments, and so forth, on behalf of our society. It is a society of the noblesse, of Royalists, of old families who love and who know America."

HOLLOCK hung up and came to the Baron, hand extended.

"My apologies," he said. "But, you understand, I must be careful—"

"Ah, don't mention it!" Cavaignac shook his hand warmly. "The prefect answered for me?"

"Certainly. Now, may I ask whether you had anything in mind as to catching Tellier?"

"As to that, I am entirely at your service—your cause is mine!" said the Baron promptly. "No, I have no plan, but one is easily made. My friend, M. de Sarnas, will be glad to assist us—to place his apartment at our disposal, if you desire."

"Not a bad notion, to wait and catch him when he comes in," I said.

Holly gave me a look and a nod, as though in assent, but I knew better—I could read other things in his eye.

"Perhaps, perhaps," said the Baron. "May I have your permission to call M. de Sarnas? It may be he would have some suggestion to make—"

"By all means," assented Hollock.

Cavaignac crossed to the telephone, sat down, lifted the instrument from the rack, and called a number. Hollock was playing with a pencil, and I saw him jot down the number on his cuff. Presently the Baron had de Sarnas on the line, and broke into rapid speech. I could scarcely follow it, but Holly could.

"Good," said the Baron and turned to us. "De Sarnas asks that we dine with him tonight at seven. He says the man usually comes quite late at night, and departs early in the morning. You may then make what arrangements please you, as to catching him."

"Thank him and say we accept with pleasure," said Holly. The Baron turned back to the instrument, spoke briefly, and hung it up again.

"Then it's agreed?" he said. "We meet there—ah, the address!"

He scribbled the address on a card, and after the usual politeness, departed. When the door closed behind him, Holly darted to the telephone, called a number, got the man he wanted, and gave him the number called by the Baron.

"This should be the number of a bureau in the Department of Justice," he said, "where a certain M. de Sarnas could be reached. Let me know if this is correct."

He waited. Five minutes passed. Then he had his response, and hung up.

"Right," he said, and lighted a cigarette. "All's clear."

"You're devilish suspicious!" I exclaimed. He shrugged.

"We take no chances in this game, Buddy Barnes!"

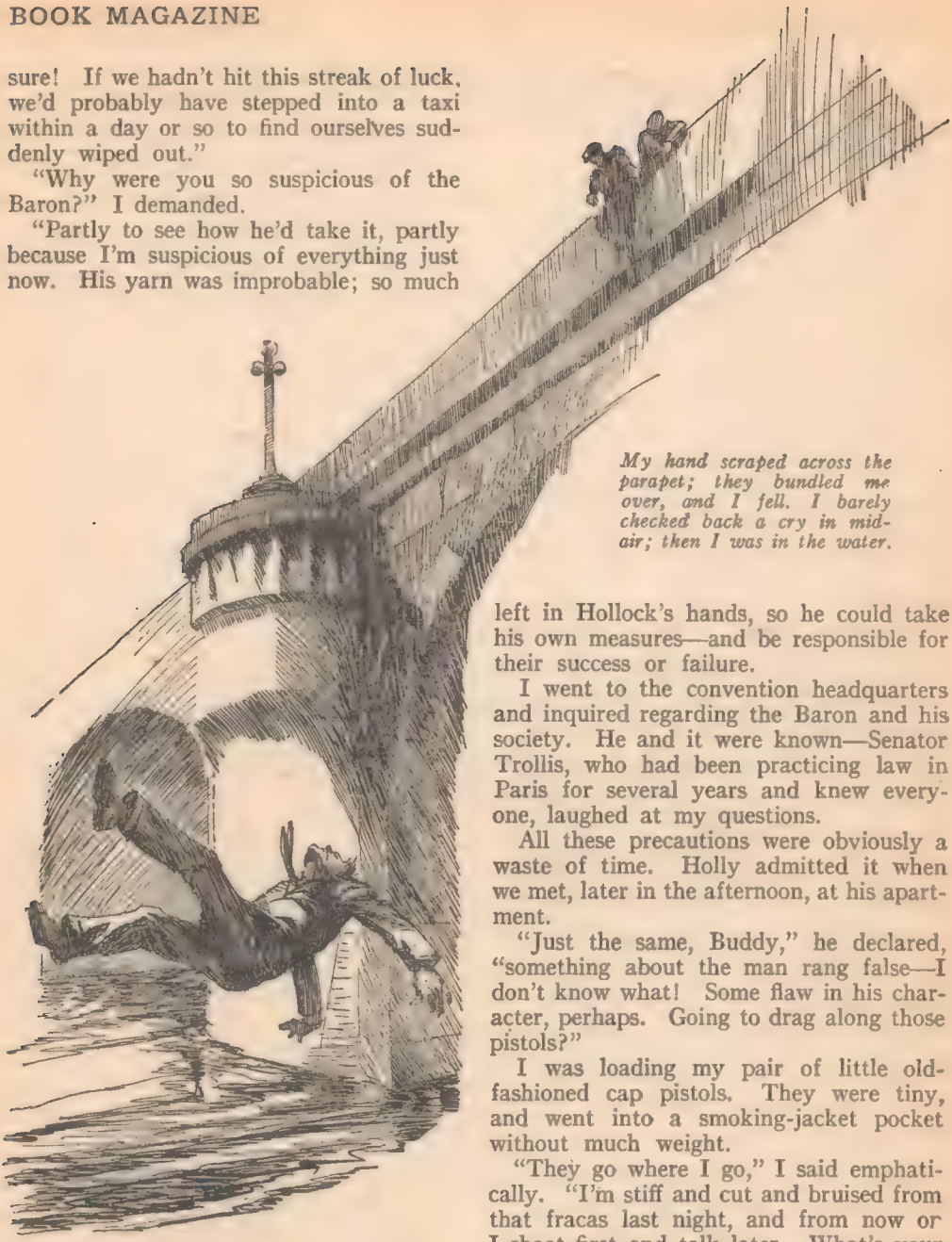
WE had to readjust ourselves over this stroke of luck—finding that Tellier was in Paris knocked everything in the head for us, and what was more, showed we had better watch our step.

"It's clever of him," said Holly, when we were lunching at one of his favored restaurants. "Condemned clever, Buddy! Not one of his subordinates knows he's here, obviously—and here he is, cooking up a scheme to get rid of us, you can be

sure! If we hadn't hit this streak of luck, we'd probably have stepped into a taxi within a day or so to find ourselves suddenly wiped out."

"Why were you so suspicious of the Baron?" I demanded.

"Partly to see how he'd take it, partly because I'm suspicious of everything just now. His yarn was improbable; so much so as to have the ring of truth, but since the prefect had sent him to me, and he had actually spoken with de Sarnas, it was substantiated."



My hand scraped across the parapet; they bundled me over, and I fell. I barely checked back a cry in mid-air; then I was in the water.

"Know anything about him?" I asked skeptically. Holly only shrugged to this. I knew well enough, however, that before evening he would discover a good deal about both Cavaignac and de Sarnas. The action of the prefect in sending the Baron to us, showed that the affair was being left in Hollock's hands, so he could take his own measures—and be responsible for their success or failure.

I went to the convention headquarters and inquired regarding the Baron and his society. He and it were known—Senator Trollis, who had been practicing law in Paris for several years and knew everyone, laughed at my questions.

All these precautions were obviously a waste of time. Holly admitted it when we met, later in the afternoon, at his apartment.

"Just the same, Buddy," he declared, "something about the man rang false—I don't know what! Some flaw in his character, perhaps. Going to drag along those pistols?"

I was loading my pair of little old-fashioned cap pistols. They were tiny, and went into a smoking-jacket pocket without much weight.

"They go where I go," I said emphatically. "I'm stiff and cut and bruised from that fracas last night, and from now on I shoot first and talk later. What's your plan?"

Holly shrugged. "Dinner at seven, that's all. I'll have two agents at the corner café all evening, where they can be called in a hurry. If Tellier shows up, we grab him, and if he doesn't, we'll wait in his apartment. Heard today that a crowd of the boys had been badly rooked Sunday night at a Montmartre joint; got stripped to the bone."

"If they want to go to these places, let 'em!" I said.

"Yes, but it makes things look bad. Tellier may well be working here under cover. We must get that bird, and get him quick. Tonight's the big night."

IT promised to be big enough and no mistake, if we landed Tellier. Since he had disappeared, the cost had mounted heavily in lives and otherwise. We had pinched a number of small fry, others had evaded earthly punishment by going elsewhere—but this time we would have the man behind half the doping, blackmailing and crooked work in Paris. So we were both in good spirits as we turned into a handsome apartment house.

De Sarnas welcomed us—the Baron had not yet arrived. Our host was a smallish, dried-up nut of a man, with thin brown cheeks and waxed mustache. His family were all gone for the summer, and he was alone but for the housekeeper, he said.

Cavaignac arrived in five minutes, and proceeded to mix a cocktail, an art of which de Sarnas knew nothing. Neither did the Baron, as it proved—his mixture was vile beyond words, bitter as aloes. However, we did the polite thing, and the housekeeper announced dinner. She proved to be an ancient, wrinkled hag, a family servant these fifty years, and was the only domestic on the place at present.

Yet her dinner was exquisite, against a background of rare glass, china, vintage wines and old carved oak furniture from some chateau; the ensemble was something to remember. We did not mention business, naturally, but when we came to the Burgundy, and de Sarnas was opening a musty bottle that the old dame had brought tenderly in its basket, Cavaignac said a thing which I remembered for a long while.

"I don't suppose," said Hollock gayly, "there are four men in Paris tonight less bothered by worries and cares than we four here. Eh, Cavaignac?"

The Baron gave him a peculiar look.

"Who knows?" he responded thoughtfully. "Each man has his own trouble or sorrow, and he thinks it greater than those of other men. Yet perhaps the man who seems most carefree, bears the greatest load. Well, we don't talk of these things—ah! Here's a vintage to recollect in after years, I promise you—"

It was, too—even finer than the magnificent Chablis which had preceded it. Yet as I looked at Cavaignac, I wondered what might lie beneath his words—what unguessed cares might weigh upon the soul of this polished, smiling man.

I was to learn, soon enough. . . . .

The night was warm, the room was close; of a sudden, I was aware of a feeling of stifled oppression. On the previous evening, both Holly and I had celebrated to a certain extent, and I laid the feeling to the lingering after-effects. There were windows behind me, and I pushed back my chair abruptly.

"If you don't mind, de Sarnas," I said, and felt the words come heavily, "I'll open a window for a moment—"

I rose, and a spasm of dizziness attacked me, cutting short my speech. Everything went around; then I saw the face of Hollock staring up at me. It was pallid, ghastly, beaded with drops of sweat. I saw Holly try to rise, and then fall back in his chair. He reached for his wine, gulped at it. The glasses of de Sarnas and the Baron were untouched. Mine was nearly empty—

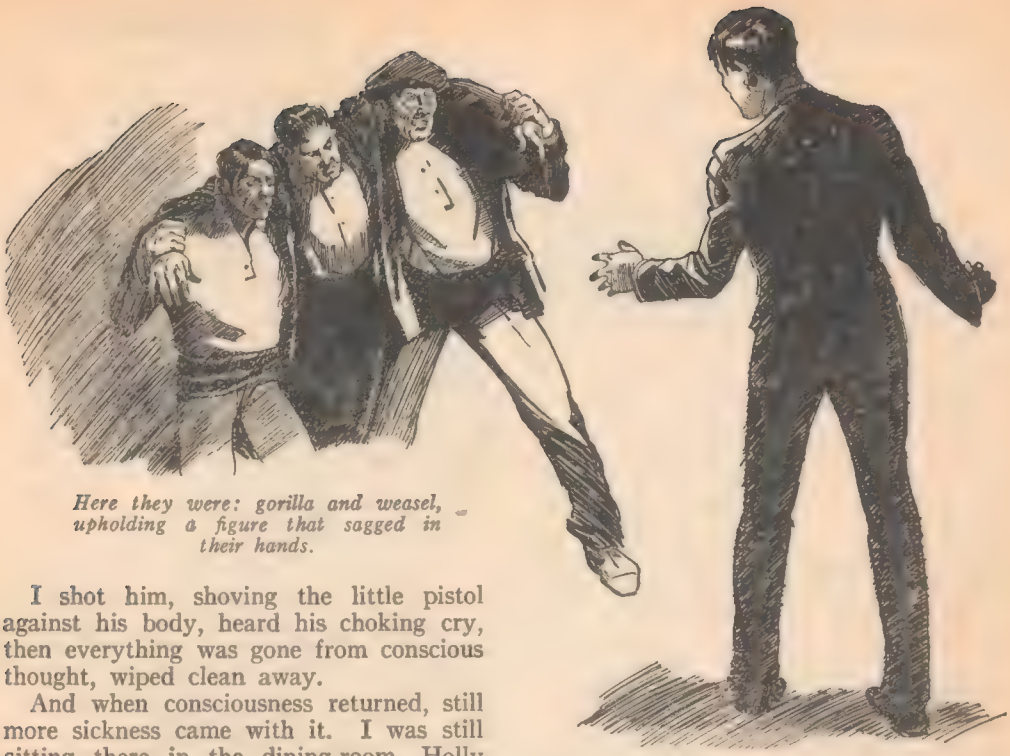
My brain was fogged, numbed, paralyzed; yet, when Hollock's head fell forward and he became limp in his chair, through the swirling mist pierced the realization of what must have happened. We were trapped. The wine was drugged—perhaps that cocktail! No matter. We were done for. My eyes cleared for an instant, and I saw that Cavaignac was leaning back in his chair, laughing, while de Sarnas watched me narrowly.

Abruptly, a violent nausea gripped me, I became deathly sick, staggered to the window, wrenched at it, leaned over the iron railing outside. Brief as was the spasmodic vomiting, it must have rid me in large measure of the drug or poison. From behind, I heard de Sarnas cry out.

Then the frightful dizziness had me again. All this must have passed very swiftly, much more swiftly than the recounting of it. I straightened up, turned to the room, could see nothing clearly.

"You devils!" I gasped out, feeling another whirl of nausea coming on. "Ah—you devils—"

De Sarnas was on me, shoving me back into my chair. I half fell into it, knew that my senses were going rapidly; a last effort of the will, a wild fury of anger, cleared the fog momentarily. I fumbled in my pocket, heard Cavaignac exclaim warningly. De Sarnas tried to hold my wrist, leaning over me.



Here they were: gorilla and weasel, upholding a figure that sagged in their hands.

I shot him, shoving the little pistol against his body, heard his choking cry, then everything was gone from conscious thought, wiped clean away.

And when consciousness returned, still more sickness came with it. I was still sitting there in the dining-room, Holly was still limp in his chair; we were alone, except for the body of de Sarnas that lay under the window, face down.

I was very sick for a moment, then sagged back into the chair, weak and faint, horror rising in me. What had I done—de Sarnas was dead! Had I murdered him, then, in my moment of unreasoning fury? My other pistol was gone—

Voices came to me from the hall, and I closed my eyes, shrinking, appalled by realization of things. A mistake, perhaps; but no! My brain was clear enough now, thanks to my sickness, and the voice of Baron Cavaignac reached me.

"You've brought the money? Come into the dining-room. They are there, drugged as was agreed. But a terrible thing—one of them killed de Sarnas—"

"That's not our affair," said a harsh voice.

"It is," exclaimed the Baron sharply. "Tellier promised that we'd be covered no matter what happened. My position, my rank—"

"You'll be covered," said the other. "When we've got rid of them, we'll come back and arrange matters. There are thieves enough in Paris. The shot was not heard?"

"Apparently not," said Cavaignac.

"Then leave it to us. The old woman is one of ours—she'll work with us. We'll get a drunken rascal past the concierge when we come back; there's old Toutou, who's sure to be drunk and has a bad record. Easily enough arranged. He'll be found here with an empty pistol, and de Sarnas dead—a clear case. First, let's attend to these two birds you've caught."

The horror of my own action had left me at the first exchange of words. Now, limp and weak, I sagged down and let my head fall forward. Steps came into the room.

All too well I could piece together fragments now. Tellier's spider-web went far and wide, deep and high. Undoubtedly he had some means of blackmailing the Baron and de Sarnas to do his wishes, and they had arranged a fool-proof trap.

"Looks all right," said the harsh voice. "Feel his eyes, Jean."

TWO of them, besides the Baron. Whose eyes would they test? For a long moment nothing happened, then another voice spoke.

"Bah! Safe enough—safe as a church candle! The other's the same, only worse. A good job, I call it."

"And the money?" said the Baron. "Half a million, on delivery to you."

"Right," said the harsh voice. "Sit down here—give me a cigarette, will you?"

Matches were struck, the fumes of

tobacco reached me. I dared a glance, cautiously. The Baron sat at the table opposite, the two other men with him. One was burly, gigantic, dominant; the other was smaller, weasel rather than man—ferret-eyed, crafty. Despite their clothes, which were good, their faces showed what they were. They were counting out packets of purple thousand-franc notes to the Baron. I closed my eyes again.

"How'll you do it?" asked Cavaignac after a moment. "Not here, of course—"

"Bah! Nothing simpler," said the harsh voice. "Take 'em down one at a time to our car—drunk, of course. Walk one at a time between us. We can handle it. Nobody's in the street, and the concierge is at dinner. It's not far to the Grenelle bridge."

"Ah! Into the Seine, then?"

"Of course. Stop the car for a moment—change a tire if anyone's about—plop them over the rail. Old Mother Seine does all the work, and nothing to tell tales—eh? We'll go on, pick up old Toutou, and fetch him back to arrange things here. Forty-five minutes should see us back. You'll wait?"

"Yes," said the Baron. "I must be sure everything's safe."

"Then go to a window over the street and be sure no agents come strolling along. We saw a pair of 'em in that corner café. All right, Jean. Pick up the bald rascal, there—"

A stir, the heavy tread of feet—they were gone with Hollock.

I looked up, found myself alone, reached for a carafe of water and gulped at it. What to do? Helpless, weakened, without a weapon—if I showed fight, the three of them would down me like a sick dog, and there'd be no mercy. Holly was drugged, and his life depended on me. Rather, on my head-work.

The drink of water helped clear things; in a little while I would be myself again.

"In a little while we'll be in the Seine, too!" I reflected bitterly. "Still, why not play the game? If they suspect both of us aren't drugged, they'll knife us—that's sure. Between here and the river, I may sight a gendarme or agent—there are sure to be plenty of agents along the quay. A tram line passes over that bridge, too. I'd better go along, pick the right minute, raise a commotion, and fight 'em off until help comes."

This, obviously, was my only possible course. Action was out of the question at the moment—I was all gone. However, my head was now perfectly clear.

Presently they were coming back—a door slammed, I heard the two of them disputing over money taken from Holly's pocket. Then one called out to Cavaignac.

"All clear below, M'sieur le Baron?"

"All clear," floated the voice of Cavaignac, evidently from a front window of the salon.

The two of them came to me. I sagged limply, but they had been at this work before, and caught me up in expert hands. An arm around the neck of each, they walked me along smartly. Cavaignac jammed my hat over my head and reported the street clear, and they took me out in the lift, which they had left open at our floor. Once down, they had me outside in a jiffy and doubled me up on the tonneau floor of a large automobile. Hollock was on the seat.

"All right, Jean," said the gorilla. "Drive. I'll stay back here."

"And use the hammer," said the weasel, "if either of them stirs!"

THE big fellow caught up a slungshot from the car floor, clambered in, and sat above me. The car started off.

With this, all hope died. There I was, doubled up under the feet of the big man, supposedly dead to the world. I could not see out, for the car was curtained, and at my first move he would bring down the slungshot. I was in no shape whatever to grapple with him, and had no weapon.

The car plunged ahead at mad speed, once across Avenue Mozart, and my time was brief—three minutes would bring us to the bridge. Desperate as I was, it were only mad folly to let them know I was not unconscious. Still, there was hope at the end—the bridge stop might show agents, a tram, passing pedestrians! I stayed quiet.

Flashing lights, then the sharp patter-patter of the engine as we swung on the bridge and passed along the parapet. We slowed and halted.

"Here—far enough?" asked Jean the weasel.

"Plenty."

They wasted no time. The big man alighted, then caught my legs and hauled me out. One glance, as I came, showed everything dark—not another car,

In a flash the five men were locked in a frenzied melee; the big man alone a match for the three agents.

not a tram, not a man in sight! The two lifted my body, and only with an effort did I resist the impulse to mad struggle. It would be worse than useless. And even in this instant, I saw we were not out in midstream, and over me flashed the means of salvation for us both.

"Now!" grunted the big man.

My dangling hand scraped across the parapet, they bundled me over, and I fell.

IT is no easy matter deliberately to remain limp and let yourself be dropped off a bridge. If you doubt me, try it yourself sometime.

I barely checked back a cry, in mid-air, and then I was in the water. There, however, I was at home. Had I been bound, it would have been a very different matter, but the two rascals were too anxious to make our murder appear accidental. I came to the surface almost at once, gasped for breath, and then heard a loud splash close by.

There was the anxious moment—the moment upon which Hollock's life hung. If I failed to find him at once, he was done for. It was pitch dark here. Along the quays, close by, where barges brought their loads of sand and logs and building material, were numbers of lights, but they did not reach out on the water. Along here the river was dredged deep, and the current was not too swift.

The rising thrum of the car engine above told me that the two rascals were on their way. Then, as the seconds passed, desperation seized me. I thrashed the water, began to plunge in all directions, dived vainly—found nothing. Out of breath, horrified to think that Holly was gone, I ceased exertion; and my foot touched something solid.

That was enough. Two strokes, and I had the limp figure of Holly. With this, the fight had begun.

In the warm water, it would have been no trick at all, normally, to bring anyone ashore, especially an unresisting body; but I was weak, and had to beat across the current toward the quay lights by slow degrees. Hollock's weight bore me down repeatedly, shoes and clothes hindered, and the shore lights drew past with alarm-

ing rapidity. However, I was making it, if my strength held out.

Then—happy sight! Close to the quays now, yet failing fast, I saw on a landing two figures with bicycles, under a light. I called to them—the bicycle police who cover Paris silently and quickly at night, by pairs. One of them darted to a line coiled under the light, and flung it. A moment later the two agents were pulling us on the landing.

For a long moment I could do nothing, say nothing, merely let them talk and work over Hollock, whom they thought half drowned. Then I sat up and named the café where our two agents waited.

"Go there, quickly!" I said to one of them. "Bring the agents, and an auto—quickly! It's an affair of the prefecture. They'll explain—bring a taxi back!"

Knowing me at once for an American, impressed by the mention of two agents awaiting us, one of the men caught up his bicycle and went speeding off into the darkness. I sank back, resting, regaining strength, while the other man worked hard over Holly. A river-steamer went chugging past, and I shivered to think what would have happened had it come along a few minutes sooner. Caught in the suck of the propeller, I would have been gone forever!

PROBABLY fifteen minutes had not elapsed since we left the apartment. The bicycle agent made good time, but Hollock gave no sign of wakening when he came back, a taxi following, and our two agents joined us on the landing. They, assigned to Holly's orders, knew me for his friend and helper, and placed themselves at my disposal. I promptly banished the curious chauffeur to his cab again, and pressed the bicycle agents into service.

"You understand," I said, after briefly describing what had taken place, "we were trapped there. In no long time, those two men will return, bringing the man Toutou—"

"We know him," broke in one of the agents. "A bad egg, that!"

"And the job is to catch them when they come. First, we must catch Cavaignac. He'll have half a million francs in his pocket to prove the truth of what I say. There's no time to lose."

"But M. Hollock?" asked one.

"He's only drugged. Chuck him in the taxi until we're through. With luck, we should nab all three of our men."

"Obviously, m'sieur," said one of the agents. "But Baron Cavaignac—a well-known man, of position and—"

"Shut up and come along," I said, getting to my feet. They followed.

I RODE in the taxi with Holly and our two men, the bicycle police pedaling after. At the corner, we left the taxi and one of the police, to take care of the automobile after our two fine rascals arrived and went up. With the other three, I walked to the apartment, and we took the lift up.

I knocked at the apartment door and Cavaignac, no doubt thinking his accomplices had returned, opened it.

Heaven knows what the man thought, on seeing me there soaked, dripping still! He must have thought that my ghost had brought the police on him, for the cry that burst from him, the one glance I had of his face, was something awful beyond words. He staggered, and then broke and ran.

We were after him, but too late. A shot smashed out, and we found him in the salon, pistol in hand. He had done the only thing that a supposed gentleman could do.

I went into the dining-room and sat down again in my chair, and let the agents get their notebooks filled with notes. Cavaignac's suicide sickened me. I felt sorry for the man. The ghastly effects of Tellier's work reached far. After all, the baron was no more than a tool in pitiless hands, and I doubt if Hollock would have desired even to expose him. Most of us will do hard things when the devil drives—and a little charity goes far.

"So that's what he meant," I thought, staring at the dead body of de Sarnas by the window. "He was probably blackmailed and tempted both—tempted to sell his honor—forced to do it, in fact! No wonder he talked of dark things in every man's soul! Well, the actual assassins are coming—"

A knocking at the apartment door startled me. I motioned the agents to the kitchen doorway, opening out of the dining-room.

"Hide. Let's see if they take me for a dead man, also—"

The three agents vanished at once, but

I saw them jerking at their pistol-holsters as they went.

After a moment's silence, steps sounded, and the harsh voice of the gorilla reached me.

"Trot him along to the dining-room. Sacred name of a dog! That cursed Cavaignac got cold feet and skipped out on us! Well, so much the better. Here we are—"

Here they were, indeed; gorilla and weasel, upholding between them a wretched gray-faced figure that sagged in their hands. They let him drop abruptly, as they came into the room and saw me; he fell in a limp heap and lay quiet. The two of them stared with mouths agape, and I suppose I must have looked ghastly enough as I stood staring back at them in silence.

"Name of a name of a name!" squeaked the little man, in rat-like terror. "It is a ghost—it is the one we put over the bridge first—"

"Bah! You're drunk—we're both drunk!" ejaculated the big fellow, his eyes bulging. He crossed himself furtively. "Out of here, ghost! Go back to your body in the Seine—"

"Hands up, messieurs!"

THE three agents had come around through the hall, and appeared behind the two men. They glanced around, thunderstruck—and then, knowing the agents would not fire first, the two of them leaped into mad, desperate, panic-struck fight.

Aye, fight! They were worse than cornered rats, for theirs was the fight of sheer blind terror. In a flash, the five men were locked in a frenzied melee, above the unkempt figure of the drunken Toutou; the big man, alone a match for the three agents, broke clear of them and was gone. Two of them were flung headlong, the third was locked with Jean the weasel—then I saw his knife flash twice, and the agent went backward with both hands at his throat.

The little man turned to put after his companion. Then one of the agents, on his knee, lifted a pistol and the shot roared heavily. The weasel spun around and around, and fell into the hall out of my sight.

Then, as they rose and looked at one another and at me, the thudding report of a shot came from the street below. I remembered the other policeman, who had been left in charge of the automobile.

AN hour later, Hollock and I were sitting in his own apartment. The brigadier and inspector who had taken down our statements, had just departed. Holly, very shaky but with his old carefree laugh, looked at me and his eye twinkled.

"So you're a blooming hero, Buddy!" he said with a chuckle. "They'll give you the Legion of Honor for pulling me out of the Seine—not that they love you, but they love the dramatic touch. Well, you earned it! I thank you, old man."

I shrugged. The same thought was in both our minds, clearly enough.

"We were two fine fools, and no mistake," I said moodily. "Still, who could have dreamed it? Instinct warned you, and reason dispelled the warning. Holly, those two poor dupes are dead, and the two rascals are dead—and one agent. This trail of killing is getting on my nerves! I'm sorry I shot de Sarnas."

"He had it coming," said Holly, and put his feet on a chair comfortably. "Don't worry about that. As for the casualty list—well, old chap, we're not playing billiards!"

"Hm!" I said, looking at him. "That gorilla could have told us more about Tellier—he's evidently been in touch with him. But that hope's gone. We know that Tellier is in Belgium—"

"Better, we know he's in Bruges," struck in Hollock, and a flash of energy showed in his gray face. "This thing will be kept out of the papers tomorrow—we have time to strike if you're game to travel at once. We can get the midnight express, be in Brussels in the morning, get to Bruges before noon. I've got full authorization already. What say?"

"Damned if I want to—but I suppose we've got to," I said, and sighed. "Gosh, I'm stiff!"

"Then let's go," said Holly, and leaped to his feet.

Then he staggered, tried to speak, and fell headlong.

The flash of animation had burned out—he was done up. There would be no traveling for us this night at least; and our chance at Tellier was gone.

We had made a fine mess of things!

There will be another thrilling story by H. Bedford-Jones in our next issue.

The Tough Nut

By HAROLD TITUS

A stirring novel of the North Woods lumber country by the gifted author of "Timber," "The Beloved Pawn" and other noted books.

Illustrated by William Molt

The Story So Far:

TO the North Woods lumber town of Tincup came Ben Webster—looking, as he said, for a tough nut to crack. He found it.

For Tincup was owned, body and soul, it seemed, by the lumber baron Nicholas Brandon; and it had been a long time since anyone had crossed him—which little thing Webster proceeded at once to do. It began at a log-birling contest held in celebration of Armistice day, when Webster showed his skill and knowledge of the game by defeating the local champion Bull Duval (Brandon's woods-boss) at that vigorous lumberman's sport. It continued when Webster championed the cause of a pathetic old-timer, Don Stuart, whom Brandon was trying to run out of town in spite of the fact that the old man had little longer to live and wished to spend the time among his friends in Tincup; Stuart, rumor said, "had something on" Brandon. The altercation ended in Webster's throwing Brandon on his neck in the mud, and in Webster's arrest—and fine of one dollar by Justice Abel Armitage, who was one of the few not wholly under Brandon's thumb.

As a result of this acquaintance, Armitage employed Webster to manage a small lumbering operation which he was conducting as trustee on behalf of Dawn McManus, the young daughter of a former business associate of Brandon's. Years before, it seemed, upon the death of McManus' wife, he had taken to drinking heavily and Brandon had sent him out to a camp in charge of a trapper named Sam Faxson. Later Faxson had turned up dying from a gunshot wound and stated that McManus, denied whisky, had turned ugly; and when Faxson had tried to prevent his going to town for liquor, he had shot the trapper. McManus had disappeared, and had never been heard from.

Webster accepted the job, got the Hoot Owl mill going and licked Brandon's man Duval when he tried to intimidate the men. Old Stuart died—leaving a letter for Webster with the direction that it was to be opened only when the going got too hard for him; and Webster put the letter away untouched. Then one night there came a shout from the mill yard. "Fire!" a wailing voice cried. "The mill's on fire!"

(The story continues in detail:)

"Gasoline!" he panted as he ran out. "Somebody touched her off! It's spreading fast!"

BEN cleared a pile of ties as a hurdler might leap an obstacle in his race, skirted the hot pond, vaulted a log on the bull chain and glanced upward to the saw floor of the mill to see the opening to that maw dark and blank. No fire was up above.

But the wide doorways to the ground floor were rectangles of dull orange. The fire was in there, beneath the deck, under the carriage, eating into the very vitals of the mill!

A water-barrel stood beneath the slide, its bucket dangling from a stick laid across the top, but the barrel was empty now. Only that day Ben had set a man to chopping ice from the neglected and frozen barrels preparatory to filling them with brine which would have given him at least some means of fighting fire during the winter months. The salt was at the siding; some of the barrels were empty and ready for filling, but night had come before the work was completed; now the emergency of fire confronted him without even the meager protective devices common to North Woods sawmills.

He seized the bucket, smashed the thin ice that had formed over the pond, then filled his pail and rushed through the open doorways into the smoke. He had a clear sense of Buller's voice crying the alarm, and of answering shouts as the men began turning out of their blankets.

The smoke was thick, but through it he could see flame. The flame spread out before him into the cavern of the mill's ground floor; flame licked up along stanch timbers; flame fastened on grease-soaked supports of the shafting and pulleys; flame leaped for the boards of the floor above. It was orange flame, shot through with flashes and streamers of green and blue; flame like a blast, giving off acrid, strangling fumes.

Down here was an accumulation of years of milling—sawdust, chips, scraps of slabs and edgings and bark. This all was natural, but what caught his eye as he charged in with that first bucket was a windrow of litter blazing savagely, litter in a windrow, as though it had been scraped up. He remembered nothing of the sort here!

Ben soused his bucket of water into the heart of the burning area and it scattered the blaze with a *wooshing* sound. The flame did not go out; it only scattered! A belch of steam screened it for an instant, putting a blot on the savage brilliance, but in the next breath the flame had hold again, licking hungrily through the water, shooting its red and blue streamers through the orange glow.

HIS eyes and his reason told him, then, what his nostrils had failed to register in his first excitement.

"Gasoline!" he panted as he ran out, colliding with Buller in the doorway. "Somebody touched her off! Soaked with gasoline in there. . . . . Look, it's spreading fast!"

It was, no mistaking the fact. Through the smoke they could see the flames leaping higher from that soaked litter to the ceiling, and then spreading, right and left and ahead, thwarted by heavy planks in their dance but by that very stoppage, given fresh food for hold. The machine oil of years, flung a drop at a time by revolving shafts, smeared those stringers and beams and boards of the saw floor, and in that stuff the fire was finding new nourishment every second.

Men were coming, shouting as they ran through the darkness. Boarding-house windows and the windows of tar-paper houses where families lived had come to life. In all stages of partial dress they came, crowding close to Webster.

"Stand still, you, and keep still!" Ben snapped. "You, McFee, and you and you!"—pointing to individuals. "Roll that barrel of salt up from the siding. Now! Snap into it!"

"You and you and you,"—indicating other men,—"get every bucket in the place. Water-buckets from the barrels in the yard and along the tramways, pails from houses—kettles—anything that'll hold and carry water.

"You, there—get me an ax and a shovel. Snappy, now!"

His voice had bite to it, snap and vigor, and as he tolled the men off for these explicit errands, they went on the run.

"Buller! Upstairs and knock a hole in the floor, to the left of the saw. Couple of boards wide. So long!"—measuring with his spread hands. "Got to get that flame drawing straight up instead of mushrooming all over the floor bottom. Form the rest of your men into a bucket brigade and pass water up the slide. Fast as you can. Don't anybody think about anything but sending up full buckets and taking down empty ones. You stand by the hole, Buller, and knock her down as she comes through. If you get smoked out, let the line move up until you've got fresh men at the head of it. Not so fast, now, that you spill water and drop pails. Hold your heads and your feet. It's our only chance to lick it. Hike, now!"

A man came running up with an ax and a shovel. Buckets clattered and clanged; a line of men, dark figures against a dark sky, commenced to form on the slide where logs crawled their way between pond and saw during working hours; and Buller, peavey in his hands, sprang past them on his way to the second story.

Grunting and cursing, the four huskies came lugging the barrel of salt; and Ben, trying to still his excited breathing, snapped his fingers in impatience as he stood waiting for them.

"Gasoline!" he shouted to Abel, seeing him for the first time. "Water won't touch it! Salt 'll knock it down, if Buller can hold her when she sticks her head through the floor!"

Already the thud of the peavey pike and the splintering of planks as the implement became a pry could be heard from above. A woman ran up, crying that she had two milk-pails. A man stumbled over from the boarding-house into the growing glare with baled utensils of many sizes and types strung on his arms.

"Up here, boys! Close, now!" Ben heaved on the heavy barrel of salt himself, rolling it in to the doorway which led directly into the fire. "All right, Jake! Into the bucket line, all of you!" He swung his ax on a wire hoop, and the barrel popped open. He struck again to clear away staves and drove a dozen quick blows into the lumpy salt that spilled out.

Next he grabbed up his shovel, scooped it full and disappeared into the smoke.

His eyes smarted but he took his time, blinked and surveyed the fire. Then he swung his shovel upward and sideways and drove its burden in a plastering, spattering spear at the center of a particularly hot spot. The blue-green-orange combination of living fire gave up to a saffron smudge.

Ben leaped into the open again, breathed deeply, filled his shovel, and doing his best to hold his lungs still, charged again into the smoke. He drove that shovel of salt hard upon flame too, and drew back at once. A half-dozen times he entered and emerged before he commenced to cough much. The smoke was thick, a heavy, sticky vapor which attacked his throat and lungs poisonously. He was coughing as he ran in the next time and swallowed smoke, though he fought against the spasm with all his will. He came out a bit dizzy, breathed deep and darted in again.

A DOZEN trips, and he had the flame down in an area the size of a blanket. Here and there a tendril of blue fire shot up through the covering of salt, but the hot, leaping, licking fire-tongues had been downed in that particular space.

He worked to the right, then, going further into the mill, coughing and reeling, and when he emerged that time he retched painfully. He stood over his salt-pile a moment, gulping fresh air while terrific nausea shook him. He breathed quickly, forcing his lungs to pump deep and fast, sending clearing life through his arteries. His head steadied; he scooped up more salt, and compressing his lips against the shaking coughs, ducked into the mill. . . . .

The character of the fire had changed now. Where in the beginning flames had leaped from the litter to the timbers above and then spread in every direction, they were now drawing toward the opening Buller had made in the saw floor. This made a chimney for the blaze, sucking it up, concentrating it in a roaring pillar of flame. On the first rush that column of fire and sparks went clear to the roof of the mill itself, lighting the interior with a savage glow. But as Buller flung down the peavey and reached for the first bucket of water, throwing it into the opening, the glow subsided and the tower of flame was cut in twain. Again it leaped to life; again water sloshed across the hole; once more the destroyer was driven back. . . . .

Fast and faster the buckets came up, some big, some small, now and then one that leaked away its precious contents. Two men were at the bottom of the bull-chain, one receiving empty pails and handing them to the other, who swung them up to the first man in the line, slopping full. Down came empty buckets; up went the full ones, ice forming quickly on boots and clothing and the slide where water slopped out.

Fire found hold on the edges of the hole Buller had made in the floor. Little tongues of flame ate into the dry wood and curled upward. To his right a finger of fire crept up between two boards; beyond it another appeared. In a dozen places fire was coming through the floor; and Buller, swaying on his feet as he coughed, turned to the next man in dismay. "Got to have air!" he choked. "Move up!"

He reeled to the log deck, leaning out into the clear air, gagging.

The line moved up. The man who had taken Buller's place soused a bucket of water across the floor, extinguishing those tendrils of fire that wormed through from below. Then he attacked the up-rushing column of flame again. . . . .

Down beneath them Ben had made the heart of the burning litter a writhing mass of saffron smoke. He started out, fell and crawled to the entry, got his knees beneath him and retched again and again. His eyes smarted madly and streamed tears; he coughed violently and it seemed as though he never would find strength to rise. But he did after a moment, and renewed his attack.

The source of the fire had been crippled. The gasoline-soaked litter was blanketed by its layer of salt; but overhead the belting blazed, and fire was finding firm hold in uprights and cross-timbers.

"Here, you! Three men—two buckets each!" Ben croaked as he ran out to the foot of the slide.

The line of bucket-passers thinned out as three men followed Webster into the mill's ground floor.

"Throw it high—and hard. So!" he cried hoarsely, and flung the first water himself with a wide, sweeping, overhead

swing. It knocked fire off the "nigger," blotted out an orange panel on a heavy sill. "Now, you!" he cried to the next man.

They filled their own buckets, and that duty took them into the fresh air, cleared their lungs, kept the nausea down, steadied both legs and heads. With hissing splashes the water from their pails went sloshing against the overhead woodwork, and gradually the glare through the thick smoke subsided.

Up above, men stood over the hole in the floor minutes at a time only. Once, four of the fighters were strangling and gagging at the same time, out of the fight, and then the tower of flame gained renewed vigor. The roof caught above it, and a man climbed to the conveyor behind the saw and put the flame out with one sousing. Buller was back again at the head of the line, breathing as sparingly as possible, hurling water through that column of fire, sending it splashing across the floor to drive small blazes down.

"Getting her!" Ben panted as Abel tried to say something to him. "Getting her!" He coughed and his words had come in a half strangle, but even so, the exultation in his tone was unmistakable.

Smoke on the ground floor thinned somewhat. Men ran farther into the building with their water, took a bit more time in throwing it. Again salt was used to cover hot little islands in the litter. Up above more water was thrown across the floor to kill flame in the cracks. Now a hot spot appeared suddenly here; next the destroyer showed determination at another point.

Living flame no longer leaped and roared through the hole in the floor. Thick smoke swept upward, but that was all; and as Ben ran up the icy slide for the first time and saw this, he cried out:

"Good work, Buller! . . . . Yonder, though—look!"

Fire had taken fresh hold in a grease-soaked timber and was worming its way up beneath the trimmer saw. Buller dashed a half-dozen pails of water on the spot and it went black.

"Keep going, Buller!" Ben cried. "I'll take half your men."

He went slipping down the slide, and at the bottom called men from the bucket line.

"Stretch out, the rest of you!" he called. "Now, this way, you lads—in here and mop her up!"

STUBBORN flames they were. Again and again they broke out, but the driving heat was past; roaring gases no longer gave impetus to the spread, and the fight grew more painstaking as the first need of speed diminished. For two hours they toiled, soaking out the last of the char, and then, with shovels and buckets, working in relays and staying in the smoke only minutes at a time, they stirred the litter on the earthen floor and drowned out covered brands.

But not until the last curl of smoke had been blotted out did Ben Webster relax. Then, with lantern lighted, he entered the saw floor, ice-glazed, charred in places, and surveyed the damage. Until then he had been all action, hoarse voice filled with confident vigor. But as he swung his lantern and looked about, peering at timbers eaten half away, at burned belting, at other vital damage, he moved slowly, said little, as a man will who is thinking soberly. Finally he stopped beside Abel Armitage.

"Well, the insurance 'll cover it," the old justice said.

"But she's two weeks idle at the inside. And belting gone and a good many other things. If— Say, chum!"

It was the night watchman, sheathed in flakes of ice from his waist down, whom Ben hailed.

"Oh, I was lookin' for you, Mr. Webster," he said, evidently frightened. "I don't know how it started. I aint got an idea about it!"

"Where were you?"

"Eating, when it broke out."

Ben only nodded. The watchman, by long custom, went to the boarding-house kitchen for his midnight meal, where food was kept warm for him. "I went through the yard and the mill, just like you've told me to do. I looked in at the boiler the last thing. I hadn't been out of here ten minutes before I just happened to glance through the window and see it."

"Yeah. Gasoline starts in a hurry."

"Gasoline!" the watchman croaked.

"Sure." Ben laughed dryly. "Ground floor drenched with it. They'd scraped rubbish into piles and soaked them too. They almost did a good job. Another five minutes' start—or if I hadn't hap-

"As a matter of fact, I am completely turned around," she said. "Silly of me—but here I am!"

pened to see a garage fire put out with salt once. . . . . You didn't see anybody? Or hear anybody?"

"Not a soul or a sound."

Ben looked up. No snow was falling.

"Buller!" he called. The foreman, face blackened, eyebrows gone, came up at his hail. "Herd this crew in close. It snowed early in the evening. Maybe I'll want to trail at daylight."

And he did. The fresh tracks of one man led directly away from the trampled snow about the mill between decks of logs. The tracks went out along the siding toward town, but Ben did not follow. He stopped when he found a three-gallon demijohn badly concealed beneath the end of a log. He sniffed its neck and nodded grimly. The fuel of an incendiary had been carried to the mill in that container.

"And now," Abel said, after he had sniffed the bottle in Buller's house, "what's to be done?" He tried to smile, but deep trouble was in his eyes.

For the first time since he had come to Hoot Owl, Ben Webster shook his head dubiously as he dropped wearily into a chair. He was grave and troubled.

"They're getting the least bit rough," he observed.

"Rather rough, I'd say!" Abel's face flared suddenly in righteous wrath. "Damn Nick Brandon! I'd give a good deal to hang this on him!"

Ben laughed briefly. "Don't hope for miracles yet," he advised.

"It'll take no less than a miracle now to pull us through. . . . . Two weeks to get the mill running? Benny, in that time we'll be busted wide open! They'll have a case against me; I'll be walked as administrator, and the timber will be at Brandon's mercy!"

"Yeah—wide open—and at his mercy."

Abel rose and paced the small room, hands in his hip pockets. He came to a halt before Webster.

"We had a fire," he said. "Not the kind you fight with fire, exactly. . . . . But old Don told Bird-eye that you'd have to use fire to fight another kind with, didn't he?"

Ben smiled slowly.

"You're thinking of the old-timer's letter, eh? . . . . Well, maybe. But we're not licked yet. Something may turn up."

The old man shook his head dubiously and resumed his pacing.

CHAPTER X

STILL, something did turn up.

Just at breakfast-time, while Ben was prowling the mill, admitting to himself that perhaps it was time to look at his hole card,—the letter that the old cruiser had sent to him with its intriguing inscription,—a stranger behind a light driving team swung into the mill yard.

"Well, you had a fire!" he said as Ben approached. "See you've still got a mill standing, though."

"Standing, yes. But that's all you can say for it."

"That's tough!" The man eyed him in genuine concern. "Are you by any chance Ben Webster?"

"I am."

"Webster, my name's Blackmore. Glad to see you! I was in here and talked with Harrington week before last, and he was saving out some veneer logs for me. I'm with the Veneer Exporting Corporation."

"Oh, sure. We've got a few decked here for you. I didn't go on with it, not knowing your arrangement."

Blackmore eyed him closely.

"Wonder if I could interest you in a deal," he said. "Market's right good, and we're in need of some more stuff to fill out a shipment. Maybe with your mill shut down you might be interested."

"That's a close guess. Shoot!"

"I'll pay you a hundred and twenty dollars a thousand for bird's-eye maple and ninety dollars for veneer birch—standard specifications, and delivery inside of two weeks on, say, thirty thousand."

A hundred and twenty—and ninety for birch! Ben's heart leaped, but he gave no outward indication of the great relief that surged through and through him.

"Two weeks?" he asked.

"Yes, and less. Let's see. . . . . I'll have to have thirty thousand delivered in just eleven days to be safe in getting 'em to Montreal. I'll take fifty thousand at the price, but the thirty will *have* to be loaded and on track first."

"That'll be fast production."

"All of that! But if I can't get the stuff from you, I can from Brandon by going up a few dollars a thousand. My cards are on the table, Webster. Can we deal?"

BEN considered, rubbing his chin with a knuckle. He looked up the road which led toward camp to see a man approaching with that quick, space-devouring stride of the woodsman.

"Had breakfast?" he asked.

"No."

"Blanket your team and go eat. I'll have an answer for you when you're through."

By the time the veneer-buyer entered the boarding-house, Bird-eye Blaine—the traveler from camp—had reached the mill yard.

"Fer the love av—" he began, turning his amazed stare from the mill to Ben.

"Yes, a fire, Bird-eye. Never mind that, now. Where'd you get your name?"

"Me name! Say, where does anny man—"

"I mean 'Bird-eye.' Why do they call you that?"

"Oh, that! Why, I looked bird's-eye maple fer Brandon fer years ontil I got sick with disgust fer the mon."

"I see. And you've been on the Hoot Owl for three years, haven't you? Know the timber pretty well?"

"I know ivery quarter stake by its first name!"

"How much bird's-eye is there within draying distance of the steel?"

"Ah, it's a grand stand av the stuff, Misther Webster, so it is! Why, on the southwist quarter av Twinty-two, there's enough av ut to kape—"

"Well, how much? Let's get down to cases, now. Do you think there's ten thousand? Or fifty?"

"Fifty? Naw! Tin?"—twisting his head. "Twicet that, annyhow. And on Twinty-three there's another bunch av ut. Scattered all through, too, but bunched, Misther Webster, loike ye don't see ut frequent."

"What I'm getting at is this: With the crew I've got, could we get thirty thousand out in ten days?"

Bird-eye shrugged.

"Domn, mon, but that's a chore! With this crew av hay-tossers?" He shrugged. "Mebby you could—you and Paul Bunyan. Most men couldn't."

"Wait here. I'll see you in a few minutes."

He entered Buller's house where Abel Armitage sipped coffee gloomily, neglecting the food on his plate.

"This is the nineteenth," Ben said. "With what bank-balance we have, how much must we get together to meet the pay-roll, that one note that you think can't be renewed, and interest on others that'll be due? My figures are all up at camp."

Abel considered at length.

"Three thousand might let us out. Why?" He put the question dryly.

"I just wondered." Ben turned to Buller. "How many men will you need to get the mill in shape? I mean, how many can you use and not have them falling over each other?"

"Oh, four or five beside myself."

Ben nodded. "That'll give me fifteen of the mill-crew to throw into the woods." His eyes snapped and his jaw settled as he looked back at Abel. "A half-hour ago I was feeling about half licked. I'll make the three thousand by the first or break my neck!"

Abel's coffee-cup went down to the table with a thud.

"What?" he demanded. "What's this? You've stumbled on a gold mine or something?"

"Nothing like that. It means ten days of driving these lads as they haven't been driven since they worked for a real outfit!"

"What are you getting at, Benny?" Abel demanded.

"This!" Ben hitched his chair close to the table and sketched his plan. . . . .

By noon that plan was in partial operation. Bird-eye Blaine, his duties as barn boss temporarily delegated to another, and Ben Webster cruised through the timber north of camp, belt axes in their hands. Here and there they stopped before a maple tree, the bole of which bulged in a distinctive manner, or where stunted twigs pushed through the bark far below other branches—both of which indicated bird's-eye maple; and where the first log or two was good, straight stuff, they marked it with a cross. Birches, also, which would make logs of required specifications, were thus marked.

And in the morning the camp crew, augmented by fifteen men from the mill, left off the work of felling timber in strips, scattered through the woods and dropped those marked trees. Swampers were with them, clearing the way for teams that followed close on the sawyers' heels and drayed these high-quality logs out to the railroad.

It was a scattered operation, slow labor; they toiled not only against the time limit set by Blackmore, but against the coming of bad weather, for a heavy snowfall would hamper the activity most disastrously.

In the camp itself three men threw up extra bunks and lengthened the table in the cook-shanty.

Ben Webster was everywhere. Bird-eye knew his specialty, he decided, and Ben let the little Irishman go. He alone could find more veneer trees in a day than the crew could drop.

"But it's a man's-sized job to keep your eye on such an operation!" Ben declared to Abel. "I've got to watch Buller and the mill too. We'll change the lay-out a little, now we're at it. I've got to think about markets so we'll be all set when we commence to saw again. And the devil of it is I'm only one, and there are only twenty-four hours in a day!" He grinned. "Where's this good man you told me about? Jeffers—is that his name?"

"Tim Jeffers? Over on Mad Cat. If you had Tim, now, he'd certainly make logs for you! But I doubt he'll even listen."

"Doubt isn't knowing," Ben said grimly, and the next afternoon drove hard for Jeffers' little farm clearing.

The old logger met Webster with an eye that seemed at first to be hostile, but which on closer observation proved to be only one of severe appraisal.

"So you're after a camp foreman!" he said. "No, I've quit the timber for good, Webster. Times and men have changed. I'm through."

Ben did not give up. He felt that somewhere behind this stout refusal was hidden a longing, a loneliness, an urge to be back in the life Jeffers knew best. However, wages did not interest the man; nor did the picture Ben drew of the scale of operations at the Hoot Owl, once he got swinging.

"I'm not a young man, son," Tim said with a grave smile and a regretful shake of his gray head. "I've no years nor strength any more to put into another man's losing fight."

"We wont lose! Brandon's tried everything up to and including fire, and he hasn't got me licked yet! Come along with me, Tim Jeffers, and we'll run him into his hole!"

But the man was obdurate, and Ben left him, chagrined and a bit angered at his failure.

"Brandon's got a crimp in the whole country," he muttered as he drove away. "And here I am, trying to do four men's work! Tough nut? I'll tell the world!"

IN Tincup he drove to the express office to inquire for the new piston-head for the locomotive which was due. He wanted to start loading his veneer logs and getting them out to the siding as rapidly as they came from the woods. He had signed a contract with the time for delivery speci-

fied, and wanted to run no chance of delay. But the repair part was not there.

"Got the bill of it," the station agent said. "But it hasn't shown up. Ought to be along tomorrow."

The next day, however, did not bring the repairs, and the driver of Ben's supply-team reported the fact to him.

"And the agent, he wants to see you," the man added.

Ben might have driven to town that night, but as the tired teams and men trailed in from the day's labor, he heard shouts and stepped outside to see what it was all about.

"Keep 'em away!" his temporary barn-boss was yelling, as he stood by the watering trough, swinging a lantern. "Hold your teams there, and don't come clost yourselves!"

Webster approached the man, curious. "What's up?" he asked.

"Lookit!" The man led him toward the blacksmith shop, where the chore-boy stood holding a horse. He swung the lantern close to the animal's head, and Ben swore one of the first oaths since coming on the job.

"Distemper!" he said in dismay. "When'd that show up?"

"But *look* at him!" the other insisted, moving the lantern along the rusty black side of the animal. "Ever see him before?"

"Never!"

"Nor did any of us! He aint ourn. He come in here since dusk, and a horse *that* sick don't travel without bein' led!"

Ben rubbed his chin and nodded.

"Sure you never saw him before?"

"Never in my life! Listen to him breathe! He'll be dead by mornin', and if I hadn't happened to see him standin' there slobberin' them germs all over the watering trough, every team in the barn'd be down, come Sunday!"

TIRED men assembled on the deacon benches that night and talked of this new piece of strategy which had been tried against the boss. Beyond a doubt the horse, sick with one of the most infectious of equine diseases, had been brought into camp deliberately. None had seen his arrival, although a woman at the siding had noticed a man leading a horse up the road that afternoon. She had paid no attention to the man's identity. The animal was put out of its misery, teams watered from the river, and every precaution taken against the spread of infection. Sick teams, of course, would mean that logs could not be gotten out of the woods.

"DIDN'T that spider come yet?" Ben demanded of the supply teamster after the man's next trip to town.

"I told you the agent wanted to see you."

The other's manner was doggedly mysterious; Webster, without further questioning, harnessed and drove to Tincup.

The agent shook hands cordially and drew him inside the tiny ticket-office. He spoke in a cautious tone, although they were alone.

"The messenger on the train says he put that engine part off for me the night the bill came through. It aint here, and I'm takin' a chance of losing my job just telling you that much."

Ben frowned.

"What are you driving at? It's not here, and you'll lose— You mean, the express company'll hold you responsible?"

"*That* don't worry me. The shipment came in and I never saw it; and if I was to tell you that the only thing that could've happened was that it was taken off the truck while I was handling baggage, it wouldn't be a bad guess. But if certain parties knew I told you that much, the railroad would get such a complaint about me that I'd be out of a job between days!"

"Oh, I see." Ben looked at a calendar. "It took them five days to get it back to me. Can't wait that long. Give me a telegraph blank. I'll have 'em notify me by wire when they ship; and if I have to meet trains myself—why, I can do that, too!"

When he had paid for the message he smiled at the agent.

"I appreciate this. You've said nothing to me, though. I simply kept inquiring and made up my mind that the spider went astray."

The other nodded and gave Ben a worried look.

"I sort of liked the way you did up Duval in that log-birlin'; and I heard about the trimmin' you gave him at camp. And I'm—well, I've seen enough raw stuff go on around this man's town to feed me up. I'll help you all I can, but I've got kids to think about."

Ben made a wry face.

"Even children don't seem safe," he said. "Some of us have got only our dander invested in the particular fracas I'm mixing in, but everything the little McManus girl has got is at stake."

"Yup. You're— *Little* girl?"—checking himself in surprise.

"Yes. The McManus girl. She owns the Hoot Owl."

"Oh," the agent said with a nod.

He shielded the flame in cupped hands, and applied the match to other objects held tightly between thumb and finger.

An attempt to infect his teams with distemper; and now the theft of a vital part of his locomotive. Well, Nicholas Brandon was taking no chances that Ben might have clear sailing!

And the following morning, a half-hour after the men had gone to the woods, a sawyer came running toward the camp office just in time to catch Ben before he left for the mill.

"Hi, Webster!" he called. "Hold on a minute!"

He came breathlessly up to the sleigh.

"Somebody cut three inches offen the measures last night. Thought you ought to know. Logs three inches short might be thrown out."

"Somebody *cut*— How'd you find that out?"

"Well, we left the measuring-stick layin' on a tree we'd dropped last night. I'd marked it myself, figurin' on making one more log before we quit, and then we decided not to. It snowed just a mite. I laid the measure down again this morning and made another mark, forgetting about the first—that was covered up with snow, you see. When I marked, it knocked the snow off, showing up my first one three inches away. I thought that was funny. Measured again. Somethin' was wrong, sure. We looked her over and found where a piece had been cut off, and then we saw where tracks—"

"Be with you *pronto*," Ben muttered as he turned his team back toward the barn.

He found five saw-gangs with shortened measures. Fortunately, the discovery was made early, and only a few under-length logs had been made. However, it proved to Ben that menacing influences struck in unexpected ways and from all quarters. An unexplained snowshoe trail led in from the north and none knew who had made it.

"Seems to me," Bird-eye said that night, "thut I heard 'bout two fellers trappin' over ferninst Squaw Lake. Moight be they aint trappers a-tall, a-tall!"

CHAPTER XI

SHORTLY after dinner on the following day Ben Webster set out to investigate this trappers' camp on Squaw Lake.

Things were going swimmingly on the job. Logs were being made and drayed out to the steel in quantities which increased daily. He was a bit ahead of the stiff schedule of production he had set for himself, and if the weather held reasonably good and he could frustrate these harrying attempts to slow him up, he would turn the trick.

Buller's wife was keeping an eye constantly on the road from siding to camp for strangers; the chore-boy had orders to look any visitor over carefully should such appear in camp, and follow him, if necessary, to determine the reason for his presence. The Hoot Owl was almost as a country in a state of siege, with sentries and outposts and all the other precautions of defensive warfare. Any man approaching camp from the south would be seen; any prowling about the buildings surely would be detected. Now the timber to the north should be explored, and Ben had elected to do that himself.

He looked rather anxiously at the sky, now and then. It was overcast; the wind moaned in naked tree-tops, and the cold was becoming severe. A storm bad enough to keep the men in camp for even a day, or a fall of snow heavy enough to impede teams that floundered on difficult dray hauls might handicap him severely.

It was a good six miles to Squaw Lake, but he did not follow the most direct route—he swung right and left now and then, exclaiming softly to himself when he came on a particularly fine piece of timber. Certainly the Hoot Owl stuff looked better every time he went through it! Money standing on end for an orphan girl if he, Ben Webster, should be strong enough to outlast Nicholas Brandon's harrying!

He came upon the lake unexpectedly, and across its frozen surface a whooping wind brought a drift of fine flakes. His breath showed, and his Mackinaw collar was whitening with frost as he approached the cabin where Bird-eye had told him trappers were headquartered. They had been there, right enough. The door was unlocked, and Ben entered and investigated thoroughly. Evidence of fur-gathering was abundant, but the occupants had been gone for many days.

A wild-goose chase, this had been, he reflected.

He had not gone more than halfway back to camp when he came suddenly upon a fresh snowshoe trail. He stopped short with a little thrill. Another prowler? The one who had shortened his measures yesterday? The tracks were only moments old, he knew by the way the freshly falling snow lay in them. The trail came from the eastward and was going in slightly west of south. He moved about to look as far as he could into the timber, but the gloom of waning afternoon made visibility poor.

He took the trail at a swift walk. Here the traveler had swung to the north for no apparent reason; there back to the south again. He came on a place where the one he followed had stopped and stood a moment, turned around and then resumed his way. Suddenly the trail swung sharply to the right, entered a small clump of white pine and threaded its way among the dark trunks.

Ben grinned as the trail then struck straight to the south. Some one had become confused on direction and had taken it again from the moss-covered north exposures of those old pines.

He went faster, breaking into a jog-trot where the going was good. The other had dropped down a sharp incline into a swale-hole, had fallen in the soft footing once, had wandered about getting through the thick alders, and coming out, had edged to the westward again. . . . .

A half-hour later he saw the moving figure before him. Moving, yes, but almost as he sighted it, the other stopped. Ben saw him turn about, looking upward, stare into the wind which blew from the northwest and then swing and go with it. Not completely lost, as a greenhorn might be—not floundering in panic and traveling in meaningless circles, but still far from certain of directions.

WEBSTER pushed on, moving faster than the other, cutting down the distance between them as the thickening

gloom made it impossible for him to see clearly at any distance. He was not far from camp now; within a few minutes' walk of his scattered sawyers. Once, during a lull in the wind, he even thought he heard a shout.

He dipped into a sharp ravine, climbed the other slope, rounded a bunch of young hemlocks—and came face to face with the most lovely girl he could remember having seen in his life!

Great brown eyes looked at him. The nose was small, aristocratic; the mouth red-lipped, mobile, he imagined, but now it was set rather grimly into an expression of extreme petulance.

He did not register consciously the knitted toque of soft maroon wool, nor the well-tailored jumper and knickers. She leaped at him in ensemble, rather than detail: a trim, competent little figure.

"Oh!" he said, when she did not speak. "I saw your trail," he explained, "and I thought you might be lost."

He felt apologetic, speaking so to such a competent figure. Why, from her snowshoes and trim pacs to the tassel on that toque, she looked as self-sufficient and as at home in this setting as any individual he had ever beheld!

"As a matter of fact, I am completely turned around," she said, and it seemed in the gloom that she made a wry face. "Silly of me to come into the woods, especially on a day like this, without a compass. But I did—and here I am!

"I kept losing my bearings and had trouble getting oriented and am getting a little tired. If you know this country, you can set me right. I should be back in Tincup before long or they'll worry."

BEN wondered quickly and irrelevantly, who. They might be. Yes, he could get her out. In a half-hour he could have her in his camp and send her on her way to town. But she impressed him as a young woman most desirable to know well, and also as one whose confidence would be slow in acquiring. A half-hour—

"Lost, eh?" he asked, and laughed oddly. "Matter of fact, I came out without a compass myself." That was truth. He needed no compass for a short swing such as he had made today; his unerring woodsman's instinct would hold him safe. "And especially since I came on your trail, I'm a bit confused myself!" In this statement was some truth—truth adulterated, given a deliberate twist; but truth still. He was not confused as to direction, but he most certainly was confused in the matter of poise!

"Well, that complicates matters," the girl said dryly. "I've got to get out of this timber, and I'm not good for much more travel in this sort of going. I haven't been on webs in several years, and I've gone farther than I should have."

Ben rubbed his chin with a knuckle.

"Look!" he said, pointing aloft to where a break in the clouds near the zenith let about the last of the daylight through. "It's going to clear. We'll have stars directly. Let me build a little shelter and a fire here. The rest will do you good, and with stars we can get anywhere."

She hesitated, seeming to consider.

"All right. I must admit the last half-hour's going has been hard."

OUT came his belt ax; off went the lower limbs of young hemlocks. In less time than it would take an ordinary man to lop the branches, he had a bench of trampled snow on a knoll covered with aromatic boughs, and a thick windbreak of them behind it. Then, walking to a huge birch stub, he peeled off a quantity of loose bark. This he lighted from a match carried in a tightly corked bottle, and as the quickly burning stuff shed a comfortable glow on the bower he had built, he knocked dead branches from a hemlock, fed them to the flame and then attacked the near-by dead top of a maple, knocking off substantial faggots.

When he finished this, the girl had shaken off her snowshoes, stuck them up in the snow and was sitting on the couch he had built for her.

She eyed the fire as he stood erect, drawing off his gloves and spreading his great hands to the warmth.

"Strange," she said, "that *you* should be lost."

"Why the emphasis?"

"From the way you make yourself comfortable in the woods, I'd say you'd been born in timber."

"From the way you know woodcraft when you see it, I'd say it's as strange that *you* should be lost!"

His smile was most disarming and sufficient to melt the dignified demeanor of almost any young woman. But this one

did not respond. She simply studied his face in the light of the growing fire, and it was a long interval before she replied:

"What I know of the woods was learned years ago. One gets rusty."

Then she asked: "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

Her directness quite took his breath.

"Well, my name's Ben Webster, if that means anything to you. And I was looking for somebody who has no business to be here. . . . . Who are you and what brings you into this timber?"

He was bound that he would break through her aloofness.

"That," she replied, however, "is largely my own affair."

Incisively, unhesitatingly she spoke, but it seemed to him that behind this curtness was something quite different, something he could not fathom. He was about to remind her that she had not yet revealed her identity when she went on:

"Looking for some one who has no business here, you said. Just who are they and what are they doing?"

"As to the first, I can't tell you. For the second, their purpose probably would be to attempt to hold up a timber operation in which I'm rather interested."

He had looked away, but when he glanced at the girl again, her eyes were on him with a curious expression, which might possibly have been interest.

"To hold you up? How?"

"Are you from Tincup?"

"I am."

"You know people there? And what seems to be the town's most famous tradition?"

"I don't understand."

"Isn't it that Nicholas Brandon finishes what he starts out to do? That whatever he says goes, come what may?"

Her eyes dropped.

"I've heard that said. People like to talk."

"Right! But I'm managing an outfit that's having rough going from some direction. All sorts of things are happening, and I'm trying to head off certain of them."

"That's what I've heard about you."

"You've—oh, so you have heard about me?"

"Of course. I live in Tincup. Few have any secrets in Tincup."

Ben chuckled again.

"Well, then, if you've heard that much about me and my job, maybe there isn't anything I could tell you that would be interesting."

"Maybe not," she said with an air of dismissal.

Ben watched her as she slowly broke a twig to bits with her slim fingers.

"Deer used to yard back in here," she said. "When I was a little girl I used to come out and make friends with them. I packed in over ten bushels of oats one winter, a few pounds at a time. That's why I came out today—wondering if they'd started to yard yet."

After a moment Ben said: "It's too early for them to yard yet."

"Yes, but the snow may get deep enough any day to bunch them."

"Snow!" he said and shrugged. "If it gets deep in a hurry, the deer will yard all right, and maybe I'll be licked, and a little girl done out of all she has in the world."

"All she has in the world? Meaning just what?"

"This is the Hoot Owl timber. If you live in Tincup and know the town, you must know about the owner of this property."

A queer smile twitched at the girl's lips.

"Sometimes I think I do; as often, I wonder what she's like—really like—for I happen to be Dawn McManus."

BEN WEBSTER opened his mouth as if to speak, then closed it again and made a foolishly helpless movement with one hand.

"Why, I—why, *you*. . . . . Why, Abel *said!*" He laughed outright, then, as his misconception became clear: "Oh, if I'd given it a second thought I'd have known! Abel first told me about you as a *little* girl. It stuck in my head: a *little* girl! But that was years ago, of course. . . . . Gee! Why, then you're lost in your back yard, as you might say."

"I was," she corrected. "But a few minutes ago I heard some one yell; and just now the cook called the crew to supper."

"Then why didn't you—"

"Because I was rather curious to discover what sort of man is standing between me and poverty." Was this irony? "And of course, I knew you weren't lost. The only honest thing about the situation after I knew camp was so near was that I was tired. I thought I'd let you think

"Come on!" a teamster cried, as his horses started toward camp.

I was as simple as you might choose to believe me."

Webster flushed, and with that frankness which won men, he said:

"I don't think you're simple. I think you're quite—complex. I played at being lost myself so I'd have a chance to talk to you. I'm glad I did—unless it offended you."

"No. I'm—I'm ready to go in now, though." She spoke sharply, as if she had started to say something quite different, and only checked the utterance by quick presence of mind.

Dawn adjusted the harness of her shoes dexterously and they set out. On the way to camp Ben tried to talk to her further, but her responses were brief and noncommittal.

In camp Blackmore, the veneer-buyer, was waiting for Ben, and after eating silently and sparingly in the cook shanty with these two—for the men had finished—Dawn set out for Tincup with him, leaving Ben with considerable to think about besides revamping the mill and getting out choice logs!

CHAPTER XII

THE new piston-head for the locomotive arrived, and Webster was at the station when the train bearing it pulled in. More, he was close beside the express car when it halted, and he carried the part himself to his waiting sleigh.

Good enough, he thought, as he drove his team smartly through town. As he turned the corner from the one block of a business district, he caught sight of a girl passing the lighted drugstore window and turned sharply to watch. He rubbed his chin with a gloved knuckle when she was out of sight. Certainly she moved with grace on snowshoes, but when her feet were unencumbered. . . . . He gave one long, shrill whistle of appreciation.

The logs were ready to come out. Standard cars had been set off at the siding at Hoot Owl that day. The engineer and fireman would work on the locomotive tonight; tomorrow, bright and early, they would start loading, and by night his contract with Blackmore would be fulfilled. He would receive a large check, a substantial part of it clear profit, in return. This was the agreement, properly drawn and witnessed and binding on a corporation of sound rating.

This would temporarily at least save the day! His men were growing restless under the driving; whispers had it that the job was broke and he knew that to pass a pay-day would send his crew scattering, a handicap which he could never overcome in time. But with the men held on the job and the mill ready to saw in another week he would be ready to give the Hoot Owl a fresh start.

After reaching camp he looked over the day's scale and mail that had come in; he muttered to himself that he certainly would need a clerk, wrote a letter to a likely market for hardwood lumber and plunged into his blankets for the night.

AND about the time he burrowed into his pillow, Nicholas Brandon sat in his office talking to a pale, slender young man whose blue eyes smiled genially. Genially, yes, but in that quality was a flaw, one might have observed on close scrutiny. He appeared to be a pleasant, friendly sort of lad, and this impression would have been heightened for most people on seeing his one short leg because human beings are prone to think kindly of others who are physically handicapped. Still, behind his smile and his evident openness and good nature was a layer of something quite different: a rat look. Familiarity with Limpy Holbrook might not breed contempt; but surely, in an alert man, it would breed caution sooner or later. . . . .

Brandon now nodded slowly.

"All right. Don't start until dark. And do just as I've told you; don't forget to give yourself plenty of time. You can't travel fast."

"Oh, I'll make sure of that, Mr. Brandon! I'll be gone long before anything happens."

"Good," said Brandon as Holbrook rose and buttoned his shabby overcoat. "Have you—that is, has he ever seen you?"

"He came into the pool-room and I sold him tobacco the other day. We visited a minute."

"Friendly?"

"Nothing but!" The open smile had the cast of a leer now.

"The pool-room's a good place for you to be, Limpy. Great center for news. Well—you report everything that's said. . . . . Good night."

HOLBROOK limped out; and Brandon, alone, puffed for a time on his cigar. It was not a comfortable, self-satisfied after-dinner smoke, however, and after a moment he removed the cigar, eyed it critically and with a wry face dropped it into an ash-tray on his desk.

Next he opened a lower drawer and drew out the bottle of whisky. Only one drink remained in it. He frowned. A year ago he had procured that liquor; for nearly twelve months it had been scarcely touched. But since the night that old Don Stuart died, its contents had been drawn upon frequently. His hands shook a bit as he lifted the bottle to his lips now, but after drinking, new strength began to surge through his body and he smiled. He even resumed the discarded cigar.

Brandon looked at his watch and into the street. Across the way the flimsy front of a store blazed with lights and photo-play posters on display were thrown into garish colors. People were entering the place.

The man rose and walked to the wall telephone.

"Give me Miss Coburn's house, will you?" he asked central. "Hello! Miss Co— Oh, Dawn! Uncle Nick talking. Want to go to the movie tonight?"

She seemed to hesitate, and he tilted his head sharply, lips parted. Then her voice came.

"It's nice of you to think of me, Mr. Brandon. But I don't think I care to go with you tonight."

"Oh—sorry," he said genially enough, but his brows gathered. "Another time, then."

"Perhaps."

Her receiver clicked up, and he turned away from the instrument scowling.

"Mr. Brandon, eh?" he said softly. "And—no excuse. . . . . Well!"

On the last word was a snap, as though a chapter were closed.

He paced the floor slowly. He was brooding, planning, and by the look on his face it was evident that he planned good for no man . . . . except, possibly, Nicholas Brandon.

PERHAPS he was thinking of the matter that was to confront Ben Webster within twenty-four hours.

That young man was in high feather as the crew came in to supper. His locomotive had shunted the standard cars up from Hoot Owl before daylight, and the veneer logs scattered along the grade had commenced going up at once, with the loading-crew singing as they worked. It was naturally a slow job, because the logs were strung at intervals along the steel. But they were picked from their resting-places by the tackle of the steam loader, swung to the cars, secured by stakes and toggle-chains, each piece in-

spected by Blackmore before they went on, their barked surfaces turned for him, dark spots scratched to determine the depth of the stain, and then checked with a long pencil on either end: his mark of acceptance.

Abel had come driving out from town in mid-afternoon, Dawn beside him; and with an added thrill Ben directed the loading of the last car, conscious that the girl's eyes were often on him with an expression which belied her apparent indifference when he tried to engage her in conversation.

It was dark when the jammer man swung the last log into place and toggles were made fast. In the locomotive cab Abel and Dawn rode with Ben as they trundled down the track to camp.

"You boys have had a long day," Ben said to the engineer and fireman. "It wont get any darker. You eat your suppers here, and we'll run 'em in this evening."

He turned to Abel.

"Our contract calls for delivery in time to meet the local. She's been coming through a little before eight in the morning. Want to take no chance of having this stuff held up. That *would* be a tough break!"

Dawn sat between the old Justice and Ben at the head of the long table, and many a covertly curious glance was cast at her from the silent men down the board as she ate the admirable food with healthy gusto.

The engine crew had been fussing with a suspected draw bar and did not enter the cook shanty until most of the others had left. Soon afterward the door opened again and Blackmore looked in, rather anxiously. Seeing Ben, he approached quickly.

"How near are you ready to deliver?" he asked with a worried frown, and then spoke briefly to Dawn and Abel.

"As soon as the boys, there, stoke their own boilers!" Webster replied gayly. "We'll have to take 'em out three cars at a time. Never could get that string of standards, scaled as heavy as they are, over the grade beyond the river with our little dinky. So we'll have to double back."

"Sure you can make it?"

"As sure as a man can be."

Blackmore twisted his head seriously and sat down.

"I sure hope so, Ben. Guess you know by now that I'm pulling for you in this scrap. But I've got to hold you to your contract—to the hour and letter of it. All you've got to do is deliver in time for the local, but you've *got* to do it."

"Yeah? What's come up?"

"Your friend Brandon has wired the house, offering any quantity of veneer stuff up to seventy thousand at ten dollars less than your contract. The office, of course, doesn't understand the situation; maybe they wouldn't give an inch if they did. But here's a wire,"—shaking a telegram—"ordering me to hold you to your agreement, and if you're late or short on scale to have Brandon load tomorrow."

Dawn listened intently. Ben's eyes glittered.

"He timed it about right, didn't he?"

"Sure! He made the offer by wire, knowing what they'd say. Seven hundred dollars isn't to be sneezed at by any business concern."

"Well, it happens, I've ducked from under him again."

"I hope so."

"Yeah. We'll whipsaw Nick Brandon!"

BLACKMORE grinned and unbuttoned his coat. He was glad. He was on Ben's side for certain, and as he lighted his pipe and commenced to talk, with an easing in his manner, a triumphant sort of peace descended on the shanty.

But even as they visited and the engine crew mopped their plates with hot gingerbread, a slender figure, moving with a slight limp, followed the Hoot Owl steel up the long grade that climbed from the siding. He was alone in the night, going quietly, intently, if not swiftly. Up and up that climb, which was steady for three miles—so steady that brakemen on the Hoot Owl trains wielded their brake-sticks the moment a train crawled over the crest so that the cars would be under control when they reached the mill. And from the crest of this grade the steel pitched sharply down into the dip of the river where alders and willows showed black, now, against the snow on either side of the stream.

On the trestle this figure stood still a long interval, looking back and forth in the starlit night, cocking his head from time to time to listen in the quiet. Then he left the plowed track, dropped down the bank of the stream to where the crib-

work of the trestle stood, stoutly founded beneath muck and water. For many minutes he was there, grunting occasionally, and when he climbed the bank, he trailed something carefully behind. . . . . Across the bridge now he went, after more looking, more listening, swift and catlike in movement, as one will be who is under a strain, and down again beneath the far end of the trestle. More grunting; pawings in the snow, hard prodding with a short steel bar. . . . . And up again, trailing something carefully.

Next, the man did a most usual thing. He lighted a cigarette. He shielded the flame in cupped hands, and after the fag was going, applied the match to other objects held tightly between thumb and forefinger. . . . . A pair of greenish sputters crawling across the trestle. . . . . And the man was limping swiftly toward the siding, up the hill, over the crest, breaking into an uneven little trot down the grade while the green sputters drew away from one another.

IT was twenty minutes later. The engineer and fireman had finished their suppers and left the cook shanty. Ben Webster was swinging on his Mackinaw, preparatory to going out with the first three cars of logs, when he stopped suddenly, one arm in its sleeve. The cook, stirring cake batter, grunted in alarm as the jolt shook the building, rattling dishes, and the door of the oven range dropped open with a bang. None in the place spoke; they looked at each other, faces set in alarm. Again came a heavy jolt, a loud detonation, and pans rattled. No word, still. Without words they leaped for the doorway, and emerged to see the crew spilling from the men's shanty to look and listen.

"It's dinnymite!" Bird-eye Blaine croaked hoarsely. "Dinnymite fer sure! Where, Benny b'y?"

"That's for us to find out," Ben snapped grimly, and they followed him as he ran with long strides toward the direction from which the sound had come, down the track to where it curved and dipped to the river.

Minutes later they came up to him, the fastest of them, as he stood on the bank of the Hoot Owl, one foot on a tie that sagged over the edge of the bank, looking at the mass of twisted railroad steel, of ties that hung from it in a ragged fringe, at the scattered cribwork, at the piles, standing splintered and awry in the stream bed.

Gone! His bridge was gone! His way to the siding with his veneer logs, on the delivery of which hung the fate of the operation, was blocked. No time to team them out, no other way to get them out except by steel. And his steel was broken, twisted, useless!

He turned to face them as they crowded up, swearing and exclaiming in hushed voices.

"You, Houston!" he snapped to the

camp's straw boss. "Get those standards off the main line. Bird-eye, start a fire here. You men—you three—get a fire going on the other bank. You teamsters, back to camp and dress your donkeys. Bring axes, peaveys, skidding equipment. Lively, now!"

Working hastily, noisily, the men reduced the wreckage. Above them stood Ben, his voice betraying tensity only in his rapid speech.

Blackmore, whose wind was short, elbowed through the crowd, panting.

"Good God, Webster! They've scotched you!"

Ben gave him a fleeting, scorching glance. "Scotched, hell! They've got me mad—and working!"

CHAPTER XIII

AND now a scene unparalleled in the history of the Tincup country.

Men were there in numbers where huge bonfires, constantly tended that the light should be steady, flared on the banks of the Hoot Owl. Sawyers, cant-hook men, teamsters, reduced the wreckage of the trestle, snaked it out of the way, working hastily, noisily, excitement evident in their movements and shouts. Others shoveled snow away from beneath the overhanging, ragged ends of broken railroad track; more men cut brush until the sloping banks showed bare and dark.

Above them Ben Webster stood watching. Now and then he spoke, quickly, evenly, his voice betraying tensity only in his rapid speech. Now and then he dropped down the bank and with peavey or ax helped in the work. Once he took the reins of a team himself when a timber seemed to defy their efforts to snake it out.

Back in the woods where saw-logs had been decked during that interval when the locomotive was laid up and before Ben started bleeding the stand for veneer stock, oil-flares burned as the steam loader puffed and snorted and rattled, swung its booms, lifted logs from their resting place, tossed them through the air and dropped them on a flatcar. Loaded, the car of logs and the jammer were trundled down the mile of track to the stream. Slow and slower the car-wheels moved until the boom of the loader overhung the gap where a trestle had been. Then

blocks went into place, Webster gave the signal, the boom swung a half-circle, hook men adjusted their tackle to logs on the single car; up they went, around and out and over the river-bank and then down.

Webster was there with his cant-hook men. They grabbed the first stick, wrestled it into a position parallel with the current, and others, with mauls and stakes, gave it a firm resting place on the bank. . . . . Another log—another, and still more, until a foundation had been made.

Back went the locomotive with its loader and single car; down it came after a lengthy interval, and once again logs were swung over the end of steel. Now they were laid at right angles to the river, piling up and up, carefully placed, rearing themselves in a broad-based, orderly and firm deck toward the track level.

DIFFICULT labor, that; dangerous labor, in the bad light. Intense cold handicapped the men too, but they worked. *How* they worked!

"Here, Joe! Little snap, now. Time and a half in this," Ben said to a stolid Finn. "You're one of the top cant-hook men in camp. Show 'em how. Understand? Fast! Snappy! Go-like-hell! See? *That's* the boy! Time and a half!"

The Finlander nodded and moved with a grinning show of enthusiasm.

"You, Wabasha!"—to an Indian. "Don't try to do it all. *Now*. . . . . Give you a hand with that stick. Big time, Wabasha! Plenty fun, eh?"

He encouraged, he flattered, he cajoled—and he drove those men as they never had been driven before!

Standing on the bank within the circle of firelight, Dawn McManus seemed to snuggle close to Abel Armitage, face pallid even under the ruddy glow of flames. Her eyes followed just one figure: that of Ben Webster as he heaved and pulled, as he moved among his men and spoke and gestured; as he stood high above them, seeing every detail of what was happening; as he turned an anxious face to look up the track when more logs seemed so tardy in the coming; as he called that something was well done; as he cautioned his men against taking chances of injury.

As the structure of logs rose straight up from the edge of the water a team came dragging great lengths of five-eighths-inch steel cable, used during the war on a steam skidder and which had been abandoned near by. One end went about a Norway pine east of the track, the cable was passed across the face of the orderly pile of logs, and about a stump fifty feet to the westward. Trouble was encountered in setting the logs, which, squeezed against others by the tightening of this cable, would hold the whole structure snug. A dozen men tried together a half-dozen times to set a log on end, but failed; and then Webster, peavey in hand, waded into the stream to his thighs, his hips, his breast, fastened the butt of the log with his hook, and held it until block and tackle drew the cable taut. Ice was running down the Hoot Owl that night, but his voice did not even tremble as he gave orders; and when he emerged, instead of running to a fire for warmth, he only shook water from his gloves and climbed to the jammer, where flares revealed flakes of ice shed from his clothing as he moved. . . . . "Son, you'll have pneumonia!" Abel protested.

"Not before I get this bridge in!" Ben grinned.

The old Justice shook his head, and Dawn, beside him, looked at Webster in a manner which might have been reproach, admiration and appeal combined.

SHORTLY after midnight the supply team drove up from camp, the cook drew back blankets which had covered its burden, commenced putting generous pieces of steaming steak between slices of bread, and the cookee poured coffee from huge pots for the men who swarmed around the sleigh.

Webster did not eat. He was down in the hollow of the river with an electric flash-light, throwing its beam into shadows, tunking a log now and then with his peavey to satisfy himself that it was seated firmly among its fellows.

A team came creaking up from the siding, its sled laden with steel rails, fish-plates, spikes and track-laying tools.

Hemlock logs had been rolled to one side, and on these, when they had finished eating, Finnish axmen commenced to work with broad-axes, squaring two faces.

Back to the decks in the woods went the locomotive; down it came again, bearing more logs. These were let down to a pile which arose to within three feet of the track level. Three feet higher, and nearly half the work was finished.

Another load from the woods, and when the last of it was in place, the jammer man swung his booms for the timbers the Finns had squared. Up they came, and down they went to a firm bed on the structure of rough logs. Workers staggered through the snow bearing a steel rail. It went into place; fish-plates clattered; wrenches set nuts, and spikes put the rail secure. . . . .

So when the locomotive, leaking steam from its old joints, lumbered down with its next burden, the loader was set out on this new track and began the task of filling in the far side of the ravine, leaving a sluiceway through which the waters of the stream gurgled and surged.

But the trip in for logs was longer now. Men did not move so eagerly as they had earlier in the night, and Ben, glancing at his watch, shut his teeth in a slow, tight grind. Time! He needed time!

BLACKMORE joined Abel and Dawn on the bank where the fire struck topaz lights from the snow. The old Justice turned an inquiring gaze on him, and the buyer shrugged.

"Two o'clock," he muttered. "Less than six hours."

"It doesn't seem humanly possible," Abel said slowly.

"I'm beginning to think," Blackmore replied, "that the man isn't human. This thing would've stopped most men I know without a try. Not *him!*"

Three o'clock, and the foundation on the south side of the river was in. Four, and the jammer was swinging logs rapidly into that gap. Five, and the heads of men working doggedly were up to the level of the old ties. . . . .

But it was cold, far below zero, and men are only men. They had gone at top speed, and their bodies were tiring. Some loafed openly, lagged at their tasks, but for this Ben Webster had no rebuke. He proceeded as a man will who has no vitality to waste on temper. He commenced replacing the laggards with others who still showed strength and willingness.

Daybreak found them throwing the last load of logs into place, and the pallid light of the early day revealed Webster's face drawn and gaunt and colorless; his eyes burned brightly, strangely dark.

"Easy, now! Careful, Henry! If she rolls, she gets your foot. . . . . Good boy, Mac. You're a good lad "

"HIS only chance is that the local'll be late," Blackmore moaned to Abel.

Six o'clock, and broad-axes shaped the logs on which rails would rest, and up from the siding came a team at a trot, and behind it another. These were people from Tincup who had heard last night of the work going on. They left their sleighs and looked at the emergency trestle, and they stared at one another and shook their heads in amazement.

Then a battered cutter, with old Tim Jeffers driving alone.

"Heard the shots in town last night," he told Abel. "Come mornin', I drove this way."

"You guessed, then."

Tim nodded. "The lad was gettin' too close to his mark to suit some folks, it seems."

Abel sighed and looked at his watch. The loader was lifting the first of the hewn timbers into place. Webster was signaling with his upraised hand. The timber dangled above him. Down it came, and just before it settled, cant-hooks bit and guided it to its bed.

"He came after you, Tim," Abel said.

Jeffers refilled his pipe.

"Yup. And I told him I was too old to mix in a losin' fight."

The loader rattled around for the last timber.

"You think he'll fail, Tim?"

Jeffers did not appear to have heard until he tossed away his match. Then his eyes puckered oddly and he said:

"Makin' a darned good try not to. . . . . But he's got to make th' local even if he gets this bridge in."

Seven o'clock, and men staggered up the embankment bearing a rail. Five minutes later it rang and sang as the spikes went home and another, the last, was brought up.

Fires were dying out and daylight grew strong. The air was clear, filled with frost particles. Branch and twig and stump and timber and even the bearded faces of men were coated heavily with frost. The gap was bridged; the last spikes were going in; that particular job was done, but tension screwed up and up, as a fiddle-string is tightened.

It was seven-thirty, and far off a locomotive screamed.

"The local!" Blackmore gasped. "She's at Dixon. In a half-hour, now. Hell, the boy's licked!"

A HALF-HOUR! A half-hour in which to move six standard cars laden with a heavy scale of saw-logs over that grade! Two trips, Ben Webster had estimated it would take. Two trips for the leaking old locomotive to drag them the three miles to the siding and puff its way back and trundle the other three over the hill and down the slope. It was a half-mile climb from river to summit with a better than four-per-cent grade. A good locomotive of even small tonnage might take them over at once, but not the old ruin that stood sending its plume of black smoke into the morning air up the track yonder! And if those logs were not put down for the train even now screaming its way toward the siding, Webster was beaten!

He was swinging on the spikes himself, now, driving the last of them home. His voice had lost its gentleness and when he spoke it was hoarsely and briefly.

He straightened, flinging away his maul. He jerked out his watch and glanced at it—and in the silence that main line engine screamed again, nearer by miles. . . .

"Come on!" a teamster cried, and his sled swarmed with men as his horses started toward camp and the train.

CHAPTER XIV

THE cars of veneer logs were coupled, their air-hoses dangling, because the Hoot Owl had never boasted air brakes for its trains. The locomotive panted asthmatically, and leaking steam trailed off into the first sunlight. McIver, the engineer, stood beside his cab, wiping his hands on waste and his fireman hung out the gangway as Ben came running up.

"You'll have to take 'em—all over at once," Webster panted. "Local'll be there in—fifteen minutes!"

McIver gave a short grunt.

"It can't be done," he said. "Why, three of them loads is a lug for her!"

"*Got* to be done! If they're not at the siding for the local, we lose!"

The engineer looked down along the rough track. The grade to the river was steep. At the bottom, just before it straightened out again for the trestle, was a sharp, poorly banked curve. Beyond the river the grade rose abruptly, a long, hard pull. "With them journals cold?" McIver asked.

"Got to! You've got to run for it, Mac, and pick up enough speed going down to carry you over."

McIver rolled the waste and eyed his employer. Then he shook his head slowly.

"Tough luck for you!" he said. "But with that rotten steel on a cold mornin', and no telling what that trestle'll do when weight hits it—" He shook his head again and looked Ben in the eye. "I got kids," he said simply. "So's the fireman."

Some of the irate glare which had been in Ben's face dwindled. He too stared briefly down the track.

"Kids, yes," he said slowly. "I can't ask a man with kids to try it, Mac. No hard feelings. I'll take a shot myself."

He started for the cab as the fireman swung down when McIver's hand on his shoulder arrested him.

"You're a young man," the Scot said. "You'll risk a young man's skin by tryin' that. . . . . The steel's like cheese!"

Ben nodded. "Cheese! But if we get over, we make it; if we pile up, we'll have tried anyhow. What's a skin for if it isn't to be risked?"

Teams clinked up, then, horses frost-covered. Ben surveyed the crowd that pressed about the engine and swung himself up to the step. He looked at their faces and smiled a weary, dogged smile.

"I'm going to take her over," he said. "If I get across that hump, with this load pushing me, I'll need a brakeman. I'm not going to ask any one of you to ride. Maybe we'll pile up. But if we do get to the top, I can't stop her alone. Without air, with frost on the steel, we'll go into the mill-pond. There's fifty dollars in it for the man who'll ride with me!"

They looked hard at him, those men, and then, almost in unison, their faces turned down the track. To watch was to know what was in their minds: the dangers of that curve, with rusty steel so cold; the problematical strength of the trestle they had built through the night. And those men, loggers all, had known too many others who had chanced even less hazardous runs and lost.

"Fifty dollars—against a broken neck," Ben said, and his voice trembled a bit He drew his watch. "We've got eleven or twelve minutes to catch the local—I'll urge no man. . . . . Fifty dollars—and a long chance. Any takers?"

He saw Dawn McManus standing behind the group. Her face was white, dark eyes wide and frightened.

No man moved for a moment. Then, quite simply, without a word, Tim Jeffers peeled his heavy sheepskin coat, took a peavey from a man beside him and advanced.

"Never mind the fifty, Webster. . . . . It's my neck."

Ben smiled then. It seemed as if he was so weary from grueling effort and strain that he must have cracked and cried had he not smiled. He said no word. He swung up to the cab as the safety-valve popped and steam commenced blowing off. He opened the door to the fire-box, flung in coal and slammed it shut.

He looked back to see Tim Jeffers atop the fifth car, settling his feet on either side the peak log, fixing his peavey into the toggle—a grizzled, competent figure, that; and as Ben, swinging outside to the running-board — his sole precaution — tilted his head in a gesture of query, the old fellow nodded and stamped his feet.

Webster drew his cap low. Then, left arm thrust through the cab window, he opened the throttle.

The little old dinkey gave a sharp, surprised bark, sending a great puff of cumulous vapor into the still air. The drive-wheels spun and she roared. He shut off —opened again. The wheels gripped, this time; the slack came out; the cars moved; and, wheels squealing, coughing and stuttering, they broke over to the down grade.

The engine swayed and jerked beneath Ben as notch upon notch he opened the throttle. Steam leaked at every joint, sweeping clammily about him, shutting off his view. Then, as she gathered speed quickly on the sharp pitch, she beat her own steam and it swept about his feet.

Of a sudden he gasped. The beam held steady on the face of a letter; for an instant he stood very still.

The heavy cars with their tightly toggled, high-riding loads, rocked desperately. Jeffers gripped the peavey with both hands and bent his knees. Far to the right he swung, and back to the left with a sharp jerk, but his feet were well planted, knees gripping that steady top log, and he met the throw easily.

Down and down they rushed, flying, now. Wind whipped Ben's face, fluttered his open Mackinaw behind him. Its cold penetrated his clothing, still damp from last night's wetting, chilling his vitals. He slid one foot a bit farther forward, worked his fingers tighter about the hold he had taken for safety. Three-quarters open, the throttle was now. . . . . Another notch and they flew faster. . . . . Still another; she was wide open and leaping and swaying and churning at those ancient rails with her little drivers. . . . .

The rock and pitch of the engine were beyond belief. It seemed as though its

weight must carry the steel with it as it flung itself from side to side.

The curve rushed uphill at them, and through Webster's mind swam all manner of misgivings. Should by any freak of chance the wheels stay on the rails, then those rails *must* go beneath the strain that their flight would put on the curve. His hand on the throttle twitched. . . . . Not to shut off, however. This was his last chance, and he was taking it to the dregs! It seemed as though the whistle of that main-line engine approaching Hoot Owl still echoed in his ears. He needed every split second of time, every fractional degree of speed he could coax out of that rocking, racking, rickety locomotive if he were to get those cars over the hump.

He threw one quick glance backward to see Tim Jeffers crouched on his high perch, eyes boring ahead at that curve.

IT was there, a train's-length away! It was there, the length of their locomotive. . . . . The front trucks took it with a screech and a bounce and a grind. She turned sharply, and Ben thought he felt her tipping, tilting, running-board beneath his feet rising as she prepared to flip over and crash off at a tangent. . . . . He swung far out, to give her that much more balance, and they were straightening out, with the loads thundering and clanking and leaping behind!

He looked back again. Tim's knees were bent still lower. He was leaning far to the inside, and he nodded sharply as if in triumph.

And now at the bridge, at that rough, new crossing of the Hoot Owl, they charged. It swept toward them, a slight rise in the grade, its rails twisted and kinky under the sunlight. The engine leaped and quivered and seemed to stumble as she took the newly laid track. She lurched and bucked and for a split instant seemed to hesitate as though preparing to leap down into the stream itself. But she slammed back to balance, and—they were over and charging the rise beyond!

Over and safe! But now! *Now* came the tussle! Ben tugged at the throttle, cursing because it would not open wider. He reached further in and dumped the sand. He strained forward as though by his very posture to help the machinery meet that demand. Nobly the little locomotive breasted the rise; bravely she lunged into that hill with the exhaust roaring fit to beat the rusted, burned stack from her. She spat cinders and smoke high into the air, and again the steam-clouds from leaking gaskets enveloped Webster, curling about him, shutting off his view. They were slowing, now. The roaring drum of the exhaust had dropped to a sharp panting.

BEN swung inside the cab and jerked the fire-box door open. He flung coal across the blaze within and watched the steam-gauge tensely. . . . .

Halfway up, now, and their rush had dropped to moderate speed. Every turn of the drivers was slower. It felt as though brake-shoes had clamped on wheels, they slowed so abruptly; and in an agony of doubt Ben looked back at Jeffers. They seemed to be alone in the world, those two, alone and watching a last hope die; and Ben, through the steam-clouds, could see the old man's arms working as he "pulled" for the locomotive. Tim spat, and his lips moved and he swayed back and forth, as though by his very gestures to help!

Up, now, three-quarters of the way. Ben, from the cab, could see the rails on the bit of level going at the top. Up another train's-length, slowing with each foot gained. The old contraption shook in every joint as she coughed now; she seemed to progress by languid, wearied lunges. . . . .

Webster shifted his feet like a nervous school-girl, leaned out the gangway and held his breath. Slow—slow—*slower*. The barks had grown to long snores. He could see over the grade now. Two miles beyond, the stack of the mill stood below them. Afar off, across the snow-blanketed country, a plume of white vapor trailed a break in the forests—the local, crossing the river, swinging in toward his siding. . . . . And if no one was there to flag it—

"Go it, girl! Go it, girl!" he yelled at the engine, swinging one fist.

She shoved her nose over the crest, seeming to weave it from side to side as if in distress. Her drivers slipped and spun a half-turn—caught on sand, held. She began a stuttering, dying puff. The sound wavered. She seemed to stop—and cleared her cylinders with a short belch. . . . .

She was on top! Her last breath had turned the trick!

"Hold to it, old-timer! Hold *to* it!" Ben croaked.

The first car gained the crest. The

locomotive was on the down grade now, the second car coming across the peak. Painfully long, it was, between the roars from the stack. It seemed as though the old engine did not have strength in her vitals to continue that tug, and Ben held his own breath, waiting for her to die.

But—the third car rumbled over the top, and Tim Jeffers, dropping his peavey, wormed along the logs and dropped down to the brake-wheel as Ben shut her off, set the brakes and with a boyish swing of one arm yanked on the whistle-cord to set her voice screaming. . . . .

Back on the last cars, Tim wrestled with the brake-wheels. Out on the first, Ben Webster drove the shoes home. The ancient locomotive dug her heels in and settled back. Down and down they went on the frost-whiskered steel, gathering speed that was as alarming as the slowing of their pace had been a moment before. But with every train-length traveled, Tim Jeffers was setting more brakes against the humming wheels.

She slid, she slipped; she squealed and complained and clattered her way down that last mile. They had her under control, and slowly they edged around the curve at the mill-pond, out onto the siding and to a full stop.

Ben, dropping down, ran across to the main line and held up his hand. Half a mile down the track the local puffed in toward him. The whistle sent up its cloud of steam at his signal; he heard the engineer shutting off, and in minutes the train slid in, brakes grinding.

"That stuff go?" the conductor called, swinging down from the way car.

"That stuff goes!" Ben said almost reverently, and turned to face Tim, who was filling his pipe with unsteady hands.

A moment for the right word, this. A moment in which the old man who had fought and failed and quit might give this young man who had fought against tremendous odds, the recognition justly due him. But Tim Jeffers was not a man of words; not of many words.

"Well, you done it," he said simply.

"Yeah—with your help."

"Still needin' a camp boss?"

"Badly!"

"S'pose I'd do?"

"Do! Lord, Tim, if—"

"All right. I'm hired to get out logs again. Guess I'll hit Mrs. Buller for a cuppa cawfee."

CHAPTER XV

IN a Minnesota lumber-town a bearded man sat near the stove in a small hotel and heard the story of what was happening in distant Tincup.

"Know him?" another listener asked the narrator.

"Not the kid. I know Brandon, and I know Tim Jeffers. Toploaded for him in 'fourteen. If Tim's back, there's a hot scrap on hand—I like scraps."

"Mean you're pulling for Tincup?"

"I'll say I am!"

The bearded man cleared his throat.

"You think, then, that the lad's got a chance of making it against Brandon?" he asked.

"I'll tell you, Martin, the higher they fly, the harder they fall. Brandon, they say, tried everything from fire to dynamite to beat this lad Webster, but they've got the mill running at Hoot Owl, are selling lumber and from all I hear, the camp's filled up with old-timers who've drifted back to work for Tim. It sure looks as if Webster had a chance. With those old Tincup shanty boys hitting back for their stamping-grounds, his chances are getting better. Ever been in Tincup, Martin?"

The other closed the blade of his pocket-knife and pulled at the lobe of his left ear with his right hand.

"I've heard of the place," he said quietly.

"Better hoist your turkey and come along with me. Likely he could find a place for a good bookkeeper."

Martin smiled oddly but made no other response.

AND in far-flung camps and mill-towns the story was being repeated; such men were rolling their beds, leaving jobs and turning their faces toward Tincup, known through the Lake States for the tyranny that Nicholas Brandon had exercised so long.

Singly, now and then in pairs, a thin trickle extending over a period of many weeks, they came, dropping from trains at Hoot Owl, approaching Buller for mill jobs, riding out to camp on logging-train or sleigh and reporting to Tim Jeffers for work. They reported to Tim; did not ask for places. They greeted him as familiars; they would smile knowing smiles on sighting him, and the foreman would grin a bit and say: "So *you*'re back too!"

He knew them all; evidently he had been expecting them.

And the next morning a Finn or an Indian or an unsatisfactory man of native stock would take the road.

Ben, sitting with his feet on Abel's desk, grinned broadly as he told of the latest developments.

"Sixty-four men in camp this morning," he said. "Over thirty of 'em new, and the best-looking bunch of loggers I've seen since I was a kid. Not old men, but old-timers, if you get the difference. Americans, mostly, but all bred to the woods. . . . . And how they are making logs!"

"Your new sawyer up to expectations?"

"Say, that man's a go-getter! Mill cut thirty-eight thousand yesterday. The new lay-out helps some, of course, but production is mostly due to the sort of crew Buller's building up."

Abel again glanced at the letter he had been holding.

"And with the Milwaukee people standing ready to finance us, it looks as if you might, maybe, perhaps be getting ready to find it all downhill and shady, Ben. I think that interesting this particular bank is the best piece of work you've done yet."

"Nothing, Abel. All I had to show was what we were doing. They can't lose with the lumber behind their notes."

"Unless Brandon finds a way."

Ben rubbed his chin with a knuckle.

"Yeah—Brandon." He grinned as a boy might over a good joke. "Yesterday, the supply team brought out a new drum of engine oil." He chuckled.

"Yes?" Abel urged, aware that something interesting was on Ben's mind.

"When the boys were putting the spigot in, their hands got sticky."

"Sticky?"

"Yeah. We'd ordered the oil the day before, and it was rolled out for us in the evening. Some bright party dumped the oil and filled it with molasses."

"*Molasses!*"

"Ever hear of it? Neither did I. But if they'd gotten by, every bearing in the mill would have gone flooey about the same time. Smart man, the fellow who thought that up!"

Abel twisted his head gravely.

"You've got to watch every loophole, Benny. And you've too much for one man to do."

"Oh, it's not that bad. Things are straightening out. Tim's a wonder; Buller isn't missing a bet. Now that I've got Limpy in the office I'm rid of the worst of the detail. We ought to keep right on stepping."

Abel put down the letter and made an unthinking move for the clarinet that lay beside him. He did not pick it up, however; instead, he rubbed his face briskly with his palm and asked:

"Limpy all right?"

"Fine! Handy with the books, and the boys like him. Why?"

"Oh, I just wondered. He only came in here a year or so ago. Your bookkeeper is pretty close to the works."

"Limpy's safe enough. . . . . I'm pretty sure. Feel sorry for a fellow who hasn't got a spry body."

"Naturally. . . . . Yes, that's natural."

BEN rose to go, and as he did so, the door opened and Dawn McManus stepped in out of the lightly falling snow.

"Oh!" she cried in surprise. It was the first time she had seen Ben since that morning a month ago when he took the veneer logs on their mad ride to save the Hoot Owl operation from insolvency. "Am I interrupting?"

"Come in, Dawn," said Abel, rising.

And Webster said: "If you are it's nice to be interrupted."

She looked at him and smiled.

"You say nice things, Ben Webster!"

Her errand with the old Justice was brief. She turned to Ben and asked brightly about the progress in camp; then they went out together, Dawn on her way home, Ben to finish his errands in town.

At the corner where their ways parted they stopped and Dawn hesitated in what she had been saying. Then, looking into his face, she asked:

"Does Mr. Ben Webster ever take tea with a young woman?"

"Tea? Tea in Tincup?"

Her laugh at his pun was musical.

"Yes! It isn't done, probably. But —you know, Ben Webster, I am beginning to think that I like to talk to you!"

"Then the risk of having it reported that I'm a lounge lizard is as nothing!"

THE house where Dawn lived was the house in which she had been born, a sprawling white frame structure beneath

whispering hemlocks. She led Ben into a long, low room, with wide, low windows, where a fire burned on an open hearth.

The fine odor of baking bread permeated the place, and as they entered Dawn lifted her voice in a light hail:

"Oh-ho, Aunt Em!"

Sounds at the rear; a door opening and closing, and then another, which gave into the room where they stood, and an apple woman in a checked apron, her face flushed as by stove heat, entered.

"Yes, dearie? Well!"—stopping in surprise.

"I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself!" said Lydia. "That poor girl is crying for you!"

"Aunt Em, this is Mr. Webster."

"How d'y' do!" Her voice was full and deep, like a man's. "I've seen you, young man, and if I was a hand to say what most folks say I'd tell you that I've heard so much about you that I feel like we're old friends." She shook hands vigorously. "Yes, I've seen you, rubbin' your chin with a knuckle which I took to be when you had something serious to think about."

Ben laughed, looking into her frankly searching eyes.

"Aunt Em always watches people for their characteristic gestures and habits," Dawn explained.

"Well, you can tell a lot about folks by little things," the woman said. "When Dawn, here, is feelin' sort of glum her chin goes up and you'd think she was mad. When Abel Armitage is up against it and aint making that infernal racket on his clarinet he rubs his face all over with his hand. When Nick Brandon's upset the cords on his neck start to twitch. . . . . Well! You're a big young feller, Ben Webster!"—eying him up and down.

Dawn laughed again as she drew off her coat.

"Don't you tell a soul, Aunt Em, but we are going to have tea! If his shanty boys ever heard about it they might think he was too much civilized for them!"

"Pshaw! As if what other folks think counts!" She looked narrowly at Dawn and Ben saw the girl's face change. "It's what I've told Dawn ever since she was little, Ben, that it's what you think about your own self that matters; not what anybody else thinks.

"Well! You two set and I'll get tea. New bread just out of the oven and there's some wild strawberry jam left. My, oh, my! Will I get invited?"

Assured that she not only might but must join them, she hurried out.

IN the half-hour that elapsed before the elder woman returned Ben learned much about Dawn McManus. This was her house, her home. Aunt Em, then a young woman, had been housekeeper there after Dawn's mother died. She had stayed on, keeping the place up through the years that Dawn was away, making a living for herself by baking, and now that Dawn was home again she was the girl's closest friend and only confidant.

"There are so many people here now who are now. . . . . No, I'll put it the other way: I'm not congenial company for many people here. It isn't their fault. It's mine." Her manner, which had been easy, began to stiffen a bit, as though she steeled herself for an ordeal.

"People have a right to their opinions, of course. Evidence was strong against my father. But he was no killer. He never harmed anyone. I'm sure of that. When people think of him as alive and a fugitive or dead and disgraced it stirs my temper! You've heard about my father?" she added.

"Of course."

"Naturally you would. When people set out to become friends it's unwise to keep away from embarrassing subjects when each knows that the other knows, don't you think?"

"Yes—and I'm glad you want to be my friend," Webster said gently and for once no smile showed in his gray eyes.

"Why shouldn't I? You're young, you're competent; you're doing the best job that's ever been done to make the Hoot Owl pay and that timber is all I have in the world. . . . . Besides, I like friends."

They talked further, of personal tastes, of the glories of big country, of the limited recreations offered by little towns.

"Just the movie! Now and then there's a dance," the girl said, "but none of the boys seem to want to take me. . . . . My fault, likely." She was staring moodily into the fire. "I frighten them away. Mr. Brandon asks me to go to the movie now and then but—I don't know—"

"So Mr. Brandon wants to amuse you, does he?"

"Yes. He's been awfully kind to me always. Of course, I know that Abel and a lot of people think he's after the Hoot Owl but they can't prove it. He was so good to me when I was little and talks so reasonably to me now that I can't believe it's so. Still . . . . . things do seem to happen at Hoot Owl. His explanation of the fire and dynamiting is that you made an enemy of Bull Duval and his friends. That sounds reasonable, doesn't it?"

"Yes," said Ben, unwilling to argue any such point with her.

At this juncture Aunt Em came in with food that was surpassingly fine and for an hour they sat and talked while night fell. Dawn was bright, vivacious, the other woman amusing with her sharp wit, and Ben remarked to himself that while she possessed a heart of gold she also harbored the tongue of an adder. She would, he believed, be as stanch a friend as one could have, and as bitter an enemy.

HE was rising to go when the doorbell rang. Aunt Em went to answer the summons and as a man's voice sounded in the hallway Dawn broke short what she had started to say. A moment later Nicholas Brandon entered the room.

The man's face, as he crossed the threshold and saw Ben, was a study. Lights flickered in his black eyes, a faint flush whipped up over his dead white cheeks and he opened his lips as in a light gasp of surprise or else preparatory to sharp speech.

But he gathered himself on the instant, moved directly to Dawn and with an even, kindly tone greeted her.

The girl turned as Brandon still held her hand and Ben thought she was moving it gently for release.

"Mr. Webster, I think you must know Mr. Brandon."

Ben bowed, a bit stiffly.

"Yes," he said. "Yes. I met him once."

Then Nicholas Brandon did an amazing thing, which went far in explaining Dawn's skepticism of the town's attitude toward him. He laughed. He laughed easily, naturally, and in the laughter was an admission of embarrassment which rang true.

"Indeed we have! Under different circumstances! How are you today, Webster?" He advanced, did Brandon, and extended his hand still smiling, and Ben was so amazed that mechanically he accepted it. "Yes, we've met before,"—turning to Dawn and Aunt Em—"under quite distressing circumstances. We met on unfriendly ground and both lost our heads a little. I hope Mr. Webster doesn't harbor any resentment. As far as I'm concerned, I've only regret for the affair!"

He smiled at Dawn and then at Ben and for the life of him Webster could think of nothing adequate to say for an instant. When he did speak, he said:

"In a lady's house the only thing to do is to reply in kind, isn't it?"

His smile was up now, and its very spontaneity challenged the covered in-

sincerity of Brandon's speech and manner. The other man bowed slightly.

"I'm glad you are so generous," he said and probably only Ben caught the mockery in the tone. "Am I too late for tea, Dawn?"

Aunt Em, standing in the doorway, had watched this with grimly set lips. Dawn replied that Brandon was only just in time and Ben, picking up his cap and coat, prepared to go.

"You were talking of dances," he said to Dawn. "There's one advertised for Saturday night. Would you mind?"

Her face lighted. "Mind! I'd love it!" she said and the honest enthusiasm in her voice caused Nicholas Brandon to look at her sharply.

As Ben passed out beneath the hemlocks and turned into the street, amazed at Brandon's manner, he brushed against a man who, he thought afterward, must have been standing there. In the twilight he could not be certain, but he believed that he had never seen that heavily bearded face before. He looked over his shoulder later to see the man, who had started on in the opposite direction, return and pass slowly before Dawn McManus' home again.

CHAPTER XVI

BLACKMORE, the veneer-buyer, had written Ben that he would be in town that evening and wanted to talk business. Ben telephoned the mill and Limpy Holbrook, his new bookkeeper, answered. A few inquiries were made and Ben informed the man that he probably would be late and that if Buller or Tim wanted him he would be at the siding in the morning.

The train was reported delayed by several hours, however, so instead of lingering in Tincup Webster went to Joe Piette's hotel to leave word for Blackmore.

As he entered the place a man with a black beard was registering. He was dressed as any self-respecting woodsman might be dressed but his voice attracted Ben. It was peculiarly mellow and pleasing, that voice, and as Joe volubly answered his question the stranger tugged at the lobe of his left ear with his right hand. Webster looked closely at him and decided the man was the one he had brushed against when leaving Dawn's home.

He let his team take their own gait on the way home. Things were happening rapidly now: success was dawning for the woods operation; he was checkmating Brandon's every move. And other things: whenever he thought of Dawn McManus, memory reproduced her low laugh, he could see the beauty of her face, and sharp thrills shot through him. . . . .

Could he only have looked ahead to those dark days and wretched nights which lay before! Could he have done this he would not have stabled his team and gone from the barn toward Buller's house where he temporarily lived, with such a light heart.

A light burned in the boiler-room of the mill; one or two tar-paper houses showed faintly glowing windows. But the boarding-house was dark and the whole place was silent. However, as he passed the shanty which served as his office his mood received a jolt, his leisurely progress toward bed and rest snapped to a tense immobility.

It came again, that glow within. Out it went, abruptly. Again it came. No fire, no flaring of a match, that. Its comings and goings were too abrupt.

Quietly on the new snow which, because of the mildness of the night did not creak, Webster went close to the window of the office. He peered within but could see nothing except that faint glow. Then he realized that something had been hung before the panes which screened the view and let only a portion of the light within through.

He moved about the building with great care to make no sound. At the doorway he paused as a knife-edge of brilliance slashed the darkness. The beams had come through the crack in the badly fitting door and in an instant he had his face pressed close to the aperture, heart rapping his ribs as he watched Limpy, on his knees, a flashlight trained on the open safe.

THE boy had removed every book from its place and was exploring the innermost recesses with his light. He leaned low to be sure that nothing escaped him He took out the money drawer, placing it carefully on the floor and with one hand lifted the currency it contained, a bill at a time, until he had looked between each. That done, he replaced the cash drawer, its contents intact. Next he opened the compartment where Ben kept contracts,

canceled notes and other valuable papers. He removed the folded documents and shook each out. Then with the same care he replaced them all.

Limpy sank back on his knees, then, cut off the light and for a time the place was both dark and silent while Webster waited, his curiosity profoundly stirred. The man was searching for something which had nothing to do with money nor business secrets.

A moment later the flash came on again and Limpy carefully commenced putting things back in place. When the last article had been stowed away he shut the door and spun the combination.

He stood up, then, and trained his light on the shelf where an old ledger and the new letter files stood but perhaps he had already searched through these last. Anyhow, he passed them by, took down the ledger, laid it on the table that Ben had brought down from camp to use as a desk, and went through it, turning a page at a time. He did not stop to read what was inscribed on those pages; he was looking for something that might have been concealed there.

That done, Limpy stood scratching his head a moment. Then the beam traveled the room, swinging across the doorway and Ben jerked his head aside lest his presence be revealed. But the beam brushed past the crack in the door and went on and Ben resumed his position of watching. Clear around the room, it went, and came to halt on the table again. on that unpainted, plain table. . . . .

And then the light jerked a bit and Limpy gave a low exclamation. He stepped forward, opened the table drawer and leaned over it. A mass of memoranda, letters and personal effects were there, a splendid testimonial to Ben's disorderly nature in small affairs. Carefully Limpy began emptying these. Match-safes, compasses, knives, tally-sheets appeared to be of no interest. But on the letters he paused, scanning addresses, opening several. And then, of a sudden, he gasped. The beam held steady on the face of a letter, the envelope was turned over and for an instant Limpy stood very still. Next he thrust the letter into a pocket and methodically stowed the other stuff back into the drawer.

The place went dark. A soft sound came, as of cloth being drawn from nails over by the window; then footsteps on the floor. . . . . A hand fumbled for the latch, it clicked, the door creaked open and Ben Webster said:

"Good evening, Limpy!"

He spoke sharply and a retching sound of indrawn breath came from the other as tne man swayed backward into the darkness.

With one quick movement, Webster had him by the arms.

"Stand still!" he said tensely. "Don't move! Give me that light!"

He could feel the other trembling violently as he ran one hand down an arm, grasped the barrel of the flashlight and wrenched it free.

He snapped it on, threw the glare into Limpy's face and released him.

"Back over there and stand still!" he said sharply. "Have you got a gun?"

Holbrook, face chalk white, shook his head. His lips formed a negation but no word came. He was badly shaken and when he had backed a few steps sank into a chair.

"Guess you're past being dangerous," Ben commented, struck a match and lighted the lamp.

With the wick adjusted he faced the other who sat hunched forward, watching him with wide, frightened eyes.

"Now give me that letter, Limpy."

"What letter?"

"I don't know. That's what I want to find out: just what letter you were after. The one you took out of the drawer and put in your pocket, evidently the one you've ransacked the place for."

"Please, Mr. Webster, I didn't--"

"We'll talk afterward. Give it to me!"

He held out his hand and snapped his thumb. Slowly the other reached into his pocket, extracted a sealed envelope and handed it over.

Ben eyed the unstamped front, held it to the light and gave a start. It was the letter old Don Stuart had written him, all but forgotten in the rush of these last weeks.

"So, that's it, eh?" he asked. "Well, if that's valuable enough for somebody to steal—" He drew a bill-fold from his hip pocket and tucked the letter inside.

HOLBROOK'S face was lifted in a frightened appeal but under Ben's accusing scrutiny the eyes fell and finally the boy turned his head.

"And now what's the explanation?"

Ben asked easily, throwing a leg over the table corner.

"Nothing. I—"

"Cut that, son! You were after just one thing: this letter." No answer. "It wasn't money; it was only this, which you found." Still the other sat silent, with face averted. "Look at me!" the words cracked like the explosion of a whip-lash. *"Why did you want this letter?"*

The man shuddered and moved his dry lips.

"I—I was just—" A new sort of fear crept into his voice; not the fear of this man; a different fear, more remote than this but infinitely greater. "I was—only curious."

"Curious? Curious? Why curious about this one letter?"

"Well, I'd heard about it. Bird-eye told it all over town. I—I wondered."

Ben relaxed a trifle.

"You're lying, Limpy."

"No, I'm not! It's God's truth, Mr. Webster! I'm sorry, but that's the fact: my curiosity got the best of me!" He spoke more easily, now, as though edging through a loop-hole in a situation that had seemed terrifyingly tight.

"You're still lying! You came here to work for me so you could be close—"

"No sir! No, that's not—"

"—close to my affairs and have a chance to find this particular letter! You thought you could take your time in prowling this office and—"

"No, Mr. Webster! Yes, that is—that's right. I *did* think I had a chance but nobody sent me to get it!"

"Oh!" Webster smiled grimly and relaxed. "Nobody sent you, eh? And nobody has mentioned the possibility that you might have been sent. Afraid it would be suspected and mentioned?"

"Of course not!" Limpy sat straighter in his chair, now. "Nobody sent me for it. It was just my infernal curiosity."

"And a moment ago you were feeling quite comfortable because I didn't seem to suspect that you were sent here for just such a purpose as finding that letter!"

The boy recoiled from the suddenly leveled finger.

"No, nobody sent me!" His voice trembled on the repeated denial.

WEBSTER laughed bitterly. Again he began to badger and accuse but no admission of conspiracy could be wrested from Holbrook. For an hour he kept up his cross examination, sensing all the time that although Limpy was in dire fright at being discovered another and even greater fear lurked in the offing, forcing the boy to stick doggedly to his unconvincing lies.

"It's late," Ben finally said. "I've enough on you to jail you, son. But I'm not going to do it yet. You take the road right after breakfast."

"I wont even wait for that, Mr. Webster! I'm sorry. I certainly thank you for letting me off. I'll go now. I'm a good walker if I take it slow. No, I'll go right now."

And Webster let him go, watched the boy limp off into the darkness, grain sack containing his belongings over his shoulder. When he disappeared down the road Ben stood alone and rubbed his chin thoughtfully. Nicholas Brandon again! Brandon after that letter. . . . . Then Brandon must suspect that old Don Stuart had something of importance to reveal. . . . . Well, if that letter was an ace in the hole, it was to be used only when the pinch arrived. The pinch was not here. The tough nut was not uncrackable yet!

CHAPTER XVII

NICHOLAS BRANDON was a man of forty-five. He was rich, he was powerful, he had achieved much of what he held to be desired.

But his experience had been empty of the things that most men crave above all others. His impulse to acquire possessions that may be measured in monetary terms had over-ridden his want of finer things, had all but stifled his need of companionship, had warped his need of love until it became a remote and ugly thing.

But the want was there.

He had not seen Dawn McManus in three years until she came back to Tincup that November. He had known her always. He had seen her grow from infant to child; from child to a wistful, shy girl, living under a cloud; but the transition from girlhood to womanhood had been made during her longest absence from the town that had been her only home and so when he saw her, after her arrival, instead of the young girl he remembered, toward whom he had always been gentle and kind while he sought to pilfer her

heritage, he encountered a blooming, compelling young woman.

He was dazed, bewildered, in the beginning. He tried to resume the relationship he had always had with her, a patronizing, protecting attitude. But Dawn was strangely reserved, oddly independent. She did not fall in with his suggestions or accept his invitations; she no longer called him Uncle Nick. She charmed him, stirred in his heart all those long-neglected and now twisted and distorted wants which, given liberty in his youth, might have been fine and open and clean. He wanted Dawn McManus as he never had wanted anything before!

Slowly the desire struggled through to his consciousness. In the beginning it was only an unidentified, disturbing urge, but when the realization finally took shape he proceeded deliberately, methodically toward the formulation of a plan.

He saw Dawn frequently, dropping in to visit briefly in passing, taking her in his cutter on a drive to a camp once, casually asking her to do this or that with him. In the beginning he detected only indifference and attributed this to nothing in particular; but later that indifference became resistance and this gave him wonder. He was certain that he had erected a barrier between her and the tales that people told of him in Tincup. He was certain that she did not suspect his scheming to undermine the property which her father had left. Oh, Nicholas Brandon was plausible, if nothing else; he was far-sighted, as well. Always he set a backfire against a truthful interpretation of events which might reach the girl and tend to make her suspect his friendship.

BUT he could not interest her, and now another element was injected into the situation. When he encountered Ben Webster in friendly intercourse with Dawn it required all his resourcefulness to retain his self-control. Inwardly he seethed with a hatred which now had the element of jealousy for an alloy. He detected sudden change in Dawn, a barely perceptible excitement, a subtle lighting of her face as Ben asked her to go to the dance with him, and his heart went suddenly mad.

They were young, they were attracted to one another. They had that youth which he had put behind him and the things which he had neglected, which he had shunted to one side in favor of other pursuits, loomed so large in their lives that matters such as wealth and power seemed trivial indeed! He hated Ben Webster with all his soul and mingled with his passion for Dawn McManus was a species of hate as well. He hated her for her cleanliness, for her sweetness, for her power to make young men happy. And yet now he wanted her more than he had ever wanted anything in his life!

A double motive impelled him, thereafter, to plot and scheme and strive to possess the Hoot Owl. Without that timber and the tidy fortune it represented Dawn would be without resources. And a girl without property, he believed, would be easy prey.

But this was a new sort of problem, filled with pitfalls, and he wanted to move slowly. Still, there seemed to be no time for deliberation. Though love had been put out of his life he knew its signs and he feared that hour when the smoldering flame that these two had struck in one another's hearts would burst into a consuming blaze. He must make haste.

Other complications rose to stir his ire, to make him violently chagrined. Limpy Holbrook came, whining and apologetic, and although he stilled the first fear which leaped to Brandon's mind—the fear that he had told all he knew—the fact that Webster had thwarted him again was a rankling, gnawing sore on his pride.

And so this night—it was very late—he sat in his office, with Lydia on the other side of his flat-topped desk.

LYDIA. Just that. She needed no other name in Tincup. The women who, with her, occupied that short and bleak isolated row of houses across the track—Section Thirty-Seven, it was called—needed none but a given name. He had summoned her and she had come according to instructions, furtively and alone, long after the rest of the town slept.

Across the tracks, to be sure, windows in those houses on Thirty-Seven glowed. From within one might have detected the sounds of piano and voices lifted in song. But they were far away and did not disturb the peaceful sleep of the remainder of the town. And now, instead of seeing that the noises did not become too ribald within her house, that those who came did not tarry longer than their money lasted, she sat, a bit tight-lipped, her button

eyes fast on Brandon's face and listened to him talk.

She was a tall, spare woman. Her dress was quiet, subdued for a woman from one of those houses. Only her fur coat was luxurious. Her face was immobile, expressionless save for the eyes.

The man finished, calm and assured in his dictatorship, and from his manner he might have been issuing an order to a subordinate which had to do with a commonplace detail of his business affairs. But after he had stopped the woman leaned just a bit further forward.

"It's a rotten deal!" she said in a quick, nervous manner. "I've always made it a practice to keep to my own affairs. This . . . . Why, she's only a girl, Brandon; and he's as clean as a hound's tooth. It's rotten!"

Brandon shrugged and looked away.

"I don't care to be mixed up in this," she went on. "I don't fancy playing any such game."

Defiance, there, and it struck the man's temper. His dark eyes held on her with the beginnings of a malicious smile.

"You refuse?"

She deliberated.

"If I do, what?"

He leaned quickly against the desk edge.

"One word to the immigration people and you go back to Canada. Do you think they forget . . . . the Canadians?"

Lydia blinked rapidly and bit her lips.

"You wouldn't turn me up!" she said sharply.

Brandon leaned back, laughing comfortably.

"Wouldn't I, though! Wouldn't I? If you refuse. . . . . Try it, my friend, and then try Canada's memory. You've been safe from their law for three years. In twelve hours I could and would toss you to them!"

FOR a moment they sat in silence. Then Lydia spoke with a bitter smile.

"I know when I'm whipped," she said crisply. "It's rotten, a foul blow—but I'll go through with it!" She rose, and her breath was quick.

"But some day, Nick Brandon, you'll slip! For years, as I get it, you've had others carry your dirt for you. Remember, the time will come when this power you feel so sure about will crumble! The time will come when you'll have no one to turn to, no one to threaten into fighting your fights for you! I wonder . . . . what'll you do then?"

"That," he said easily, "is distinctly my own affair."

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was Saturday night and Tincup was dancing. In the Odd Fellows Hall a violin, a cornet and a piano made music for the scores who had paid their fee and danced in the glaring, barren room.

They were all there, the young, the very old, the well-to-do, the poor. Men from camps, their hair slicked down and socks-and-rubbers exchanged for shoes, perspired and pranced through quadrilles beside buxom wives and daughters of their clan; shingle weavers from the mill, clerks from the stores one-stepped with daughters of the modern generation. Whole families had come and with them they brought not a few infants who complicated matters for parents and swirling couples by braving the crowded floor to get to some place other than that they occupied and who squawked and yawped when forced back to the line of chairs placed against the white-plastered walls.

And among them, a cynosure for all eyes, went Ben Webster and Dawn McManus.

It was the first time many of the townspeople had had a real good look at Dawn since her return; it was Ben Webster's initial appearance at a social function; it was their first appearance in public together. Curiosity prompted much of the neck craning because Dawn, the daughter of Denny McManus, always had been a conspicuous figure, but now her loveliness was heightened by a flush of pleasurable excitement and both men and women forgot that she was known chiefly as the daughter of a murderer.

Ben, dressed in a modest business suit instead of the woods clothing in which they had always seen him, looked even more youthful. His laugh was easy and his smile, as he was presented to new acquaintances, was infectious. Indeed, he looked more like a college lad on one of a long series of larks than the superintendent of an operation that was making a good job of holding out against the most ruthless competition the country had ever seen.

The two were having the time of their

lives. Through square dances they moved with grace and assurance because while others of their generation had never become familiar with the figures of old quadrilles they, children of the timber, knew every intricate call. When they danced the alternating "round dances" they moved as one, rhythmically, joyously.

Ben talked. How he talked! He talked of this, that, the other thing constantly. He felt that he must talk and keep talking of impersonal matters or he would find himself blurting words of love into Dawn's ear, there in a public dance hall. He never had beheld such bewitching beauty in all his life! The fragrance of her hair, the light pressure of her hand in his, the sound of her voice intoxicated him and he felt that unless he kept talking of trivial things he would find himself shouting:

"You are the most lovely thing that ever breathed and I love you, love you, *love you!*"

So he seized upon every subject that came into his head eagerly, almost desperately.

Now he was talking of the new bookkeeper he had hired a few days before.

"Queer fellow, in a way. Seems to be capable of a much better job than keeping books for the Hoot Owl. I've guessed at booze, disastrous family experience and any number of things, but none seems to fit him. At first I was a little leary of putting him into the office and had him in the mill a couple of days but, gee, you can't let a man who's certainly a high-grade office-hand do work like that!

"I brought him in and told him I needed a bookkeeper but had just had one experience with a man that made me cautious."

"Did you?" Dawn asked, suddenly interested.

Ben laughed, reminding himself that he must be cautious and not reveal too many of his problems, not even to the owner of the property.

"Oh, I had a boy out there who was a little light-fingered. He didn't get away with anything, luckily.

"But I told Martin—John Martin, his name is—that I was going to put him on the books if he'd take the job with the understanding that I was going to suspect him for a long time. He gave me one of the funniest looks I've ever seen and said he wasn't afraid to be suspected. . . . .

"So there he is. We're in the new office, now. He and I each have a little room just big enough for a bed and I like him a lot."

The dance ended and they walked toward vacant chairs and were so occupied with one another that they did not notice the hush that had fallen over the place, nor the woman until she had crossed the floor and stopped before them.

LYDIA had timed her entrance well, indeed. She had gone slowly up the stairway and stood peering through the ranks of onlookers that clustered about the doorway until the floor was cleared. Then, with a short, imperative word, she shouldered her way through and entered.

She stopped just within the threshold and shook the light snow from her fur coat and that gesture was enough to cause words to die in the throats of those who saw. Lydia, here! Lydia, from Thirty-Seven, invading this place where decent people, where good men and women and little children were assembled!

A whispered word here broke other conversations. A startled look over there caused more to stop talking. And when the clatter of voices had lowered to a mumble and the mumble was dying to a hūsh, she started forward.

The woman did not hesitate. Head up, intently, she crossed the floor straight toward Ben Webster who, face turned toward Dawn to miss no change in her mobile face, still talked with animation, unaware of the hush. . . . .

He did not stop talking until the woman's shadow fell upon him. Then he looked up, saw her and rose.

He rose because a woman was standing there, evidently waiting to speak to him. He did not know her; had never seen her before. He had no time to observe and judge. He would have risen, anyhow, because he was courteous.

He did more than rise. He even bowed just a trifle when he saw that her eyes were so fast on him. He did not notice that Dawn went pale, that one hand lifted quickly to her cheek, finger tips resting against paling skin.

Lydia's voice sounded sharp and hard in the silence.

"I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself!" she said.

Ben had started to smile, but this changed to a frown of perplexity.

"Ashamed, ma'am?" he asked. "Why, I—"

"Yes, ashamed! There's that poor girl in my house, sick and crying for you like she's been crying for days! You brought her here, didn't you? You're the one who got her to come to Tincup. And now, when she needs you, you wont come near her!"

Ben looked at Dawn, who was shrinking back in her chair; at other people whose faces reflected incredulity or vicarious guilt or fright.

"Ma'am, I— That is, I don't understand you," he stammered.

His eyes were taking her in, now, from her costly fur coat to the emerald earrings and the hardness of her eyes; and, as in a daze, he classified her, put her in the shameful niche which was hers. A great flush of bewilderment swept into his face.

"Don't understand!" Lydia laughed harshly. "I'll say you *do* understand! Maybe you think you can abuse a girl like that and get away with it in this town, but not while she's in my house, you can't!"

A WAVE of humiliation swept Ben. What could a man do in a situation like this? What could he say? He was fouled, outmatched! Nothing in his experience stood him in stead to meet this emergency.

He made as if to speak but no words came and he lifted one hand helplessly and let it drop again. Behind him, Dawn was on her feet, edging away, faint and dizzy. She had waited for him to say something, to do something to disprove this monstrous thing, but he was dumb, stricken, blushing furiously as a guilty man might blush!

"Why . . . . Why, this is an outrage," he began weakly, not knowing that Dawn moved away at the tremor in his voice. But his fighting spirit surged upward, steadied him. "I've never seen you in my life! I don't even know what you're talking about! This is either a mistake or—"

"Mistake!" the woman cried shrilly. "Don't try to get away with that! I suppose it does surprise you to have me find you here! But you've kept out of sight, dodged me and—"

"Stop!" he thundered. "Stop it, I say!"

For an instant his conviction checked them, people shifting to see and hear her. Movement was going on about better, one man mounting a chair. The crowd by the doorway had turned from watching the slender figure scurry down the stairs. But Webster was unaware of all this.

"There's no stopping me now, Webster! I've come to show you up—"

"You've come to make trouble on a foundation of lies!" he said and stepped closer to her.

His face was drawn and pale, now, jaws set, and his eyes flared dangerously. Her gaze wavered and her set mouth worked a bit.

"This is some outrageous plot," he said evenly, and so lowly that only those nearest could hear. "This is done deliberately to give me a black eye before these people here! You're a party to a filthy scheme!"

HIS look, his manner, the utter honesty of his conviction would have caused a less hardened woman to wilt, to whimper. But Lydia was hard beyond words; she was schooled in self-control. She drew herself up and laughed again, a sneering laugh, and it seemed so genuine that people looked at one another with significant nods.

"Fine words, Webster! Fine words! But this girl's tears and misery are on your head and if you wont help her, I will. She goes back where she came from tomorrow!"

With that she turned and, quite composed, almost proud in her bearing, crossed the floor. Ben watched her go until she had disappeared down the stairway. Then he faced about, wondering what he could say to Dawn McManus, but she was not there.

His face went blank in amazement, bewilderment.

"She ducked out," a man whispered and the sound carried through the room.

Gone! Fled because she believed this woman! His heart went cold but he gathered himself together and with a grim smile stalked out of the hall.

A climax of a most vividly dramatic sort comes in the next installment of this fine novel. Watch for it in the next, the April, issue.

Stopping by their table one evening, Borolyi asked for an introduction.

Free Lances in Diplomacy

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"An Adventure in Backfire" handles a present-day international problem with all the skill and dramatic power which made this long-sustained series famous.

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THE thing had been touched upon, more or less, at every tea-table upon the Terrace of the House of Commons, overlooking the Thames, and was carried from there to wherever the various Members or their guests were dining. Later it cropped up at several affairs in the West End—but perhaps at greater length in Laudersley House, where the Countess' guests were dancing away the remainder of the evening or sitting around bridge-tables in the drawing-room. There are still many town-houses where people hailing from the more culpable of the Central Powers haven't been received since the "late unpleasantness"—but probably a majority of the London hostesses find it too much of an exertion to keep up the bars indefinitely, and receive men or women of any race who are sufficiently well-bred to observe the conventions and avoid getting into discussions which edge toward a personal application.

Von Holtz had avoided being drawn beyond generalities until late in the evening. Finally, however, he found himself in a group with Lady Laudersley, Earl Trevor of Dyvnaint, one of the Cabinet men whom you always saw at social functions, and a handsome Austrian baroness.

Trevor—knowing well Von Holtz's position, of course, through mutual trade associations and long acquaintance with the man himself—had avoided bringing the subject up, as it would get none of them anywhere. But the Countess, the Baroness and the Honorable Secretary were after first-hand information.

"Of course, Herr Graf, there has been a good deal of discussion upon the subject all this afternoon and evening—stirred up by Lord Fermway's speech in the House, last night—but it's all from

our English point of view—what we are inclined to fancy may be on the cards in the near future but hope will not, because it would be a tacit violation of the Versailles Treaty and the Locarno Pact. Do you not think it would be that?"

"I think Your Ladyship looks more at the letter of the law than at the actual and normally inevitable fact. Look you! It is said there is to be a new Triple Alliance—Germany, Hungary and Austria—which, in effect, will amount to a federation of German states much stronger than any of the old Germanic Empires. Now—if you bring about anything like that in actual political form—a new German Federation under a single president and parliament—of course you give some color to the claim of treaty violation. But it is not happening that way. What really is happening is the logical outcome of modern conditions and competition between all of the German peoples and the outside nations. As a consequence of the great split-up, Hungary and Austria, today, are weak republics which would be on the verge of bankruptcy were it not for the business they actually are doing with German organization and capital. On our side, we find it more advantageous to manufacture certain lines in those two countries and Czecho-Slovakia than in Germany. Nearness to raw material is but one of the factors. Now—will you English or French go so far as to say that German-speaking peoples must not act together in a business way when it is so obviously for their interest to do so?"

"Well—it would depend somewhat, I fancy, upon whether such trade affiliations made your combination vastly more powerful as a war-making state. It was the intention at Locarno and Geneva to prevent anything like that!"

"And—er—how would Your Ladyship suggest preventing us?"

"Why—I suppose economic pressure, agreed upon by the nations at Geneva."

"That is nonsense—as Your Ladyship will see if you study the question further. We now have access to all the raw material we can use, if necessary—in Russia. Today it is *we* who are in position to bring the 'economic pressure' upon other world-states; already, we are selling German goods in every one of them against very strong home competition."

"But, Herr Graf, do you not see that if all your countrymen take the same attitude that you do, calmly stating that you propose going ahead with your German Federated States regardless of how it is considered among other nations, you bring the question squarely into an *impasse*—into a position where there may be finally no other recourse but force to prevent what we see as a menace?"

"My dear Countess," remonstrated Von Holtz, "it is you who are suggesting armed force—not we Germans! We do not, today, consider force the best method—it is too wasteful."

EARL TREVOR laughed lightly. "If Your Ladyship permits the quotation, Von Holtz is telling us without any beating about the bush, as the Yankees would say: 'That's the situation! What in hell are you going to do about it?' We might just as well accept the fact, too, that it *is* the situation! Germany will naturally perfect her trade organizations and consolidations with all German-speaking states in spite of any protests which may be made, because it is so obviously for her trade interests to do so—unless some unforeseen obstacles prevent. And I'm wondering just a bit whether the Baroness, here, may not give us a hint that there are such obstacles under the surface. Isn't that near the truth, Baroness?"

"To some extent—unquestionably. How much, I do not know. For my own part, I would very strongly regret anything of the sort. Of course at the moment, we are under socialist rule, but that sort of thing is ephemeral—sooner or later, it must pass. The world cannot progress without capital and capitalistic employment. It never has since the first time one man worked for another man, and it never will as long as human nature remains the same—we must have some monetary reward to strive for, or there is no interest in working at all. But even if a federation of German states is brought about, it wont stay together long."

"Hmph! Von Holtz appears certain that it will—from self-interest. You seem to have reasons for a belief that it may not. And our friend the Honorable Secretary is by no means the only Englishman who would give something to know which of you is the nearer right!"

The Countess' guests were continually arriving or leaving as they came from some earlier affair or went on to a later one. Baroness von Bremmernin left about

twelve—and Earl Trevor, who had been quietly keeping track of her, was at the *porte cochère* waiting for his car when she came down. A fog was thickening somewhat, and she had difficulty in locating her chauffeur or car—so His Lordship offered to set her down at the house where she was staying for the season, leaving word for her chauffeur to go home with the car when he appeared. As the Trevor machine started away in the fog, his efficient Afghan seeming to find his way by instinct, Trevor suggested a confidential talk and instructed his man to drive about for half an hour before stopping at her house.

"I'VE been wondering, Baroness—since that little discussion with Von Holtz—just how strong your objection really is to a consolidation?" Trevor began. "How far would you go to prevent it—or, say, delay it a few years at least?"

"Your Lordship was well known and liked at our Emperor's court in the old days. You remember us as a powerful nation—a dual monarchy to be treated with the most respectful consideration in all international affairs. We were a proud race, we Austrians, and still are. Had we been left to settle the matter of the Archducal murders with Serbia, by ourselves, we were quite able to do so even if Russia had taken a hand on the Serbian side—because we knew the Russian army organization was rotten to the core. But Germany insisted upon declaring war and dragged us into a far greater catastrophe than we ever had dreamed of. Germany lost her colonies, some men and a serious amount of money—but her industrial organization was left intact, her territory not invaded. She had the most favorable opportunity even for the amazing rehabilitation she has accomplished. On the other hand, our country was dismembered—split into a couple of weak radical republics and fragments of other states. This is our zero hour—yet there are still the makings of another great nation among us and the Magyars. All of us expect it to come about, eventually. But with a German consolidation, we would be simply departments of a greater Germany. Is it any wonder that we object to selling our birthright for any such mess of pottage as that? Oh, I grant you that our commercial class look at it differently—they see nothing but the trade advantage in hooking up with Germany. But once a party to any such agreement, we never would be permitted to regain our independence as an Austrian state. You ask me how far I would go to prevent this? Show me a way that has the slightest element of success, and I may surprise you! For a man who has really nothing to suggest, you've said too much. For one who may have the germ of an idea, you haven't said enough—as yet."

"Well, it amounts to just about that—the 'germ of an idea.' And it would be such a stupendous joke in several ways that it's ridiculous. You recall the French Revolution—the Reign of Terror—and you can easily visualize the general impression of the French that the end of the world had come, that the future held nothing but chaos and destruction. Yet in a few short years matters began to stabilize. Today France is one of the world's great powers. Very good! Then, if Austria and Hungary pass through a temporary Reign of Terror, similar in nature, isn't it quite as likely that they will also emerge stronger than ever?"

"I suppose you are alluding to our radical government, just now—foreseeing a bloody but temporary upheaval?"

"I'm suggesting that sort of crisis. It's bound to come anyway—why not crystallize the thing at once in the secret hope that every German industrial plant will be destroyed in the upheaval? If the general disorganization goes far enough, it will undo all of the patient, thorough preparation by Germany to use Austria and Hungary for her own ends. When matters quiet down again, it will not be difficult to find American, French or English capital for reconstruction under your own two flags, or under one united flag as before. The whole crux of the matter is the existence of a strong national feeling among you. If you haven't it, if you consider yourselves all Teutonic, all Germanic, in thought, ideas, methods and aspirations, any such course would be criminal folly. On the other hand, if you dream of another united Austria-Hungary or even a Greater Austria, it is suicide to acquiesce in a permanent yoking up with Germany which would make you rather less than the tail of the dog. . . . . Have you ever gone among the working-class to get their views and ideas?"

The Baroness nodded.

"Once—and nearly lost my life!"

When Burns and Jeeves returned, they found the Baroness chatting easily in Russian with Levinski.

"Hmph! Went down there with the inner feeling that they were *canaille* who might soil you with their touch—eh? Aye, that would be about the reaction you titled Austrians would have had in the old days, and of course you learned absolutely nothing. Yet I'd say you are an exceptionally good actress when you choose to exert yourself. Question is—have you nerve enough to attempt that sort of thing again after being coached in exactly what you are to say and do? Here's the point, d'ye see: A lot of former aristocrats have turned 'parlor reds'—partly to save their own throats, partly from motives of revenge for some fancied slight by their own class. So the mass of the radicals not only are used to having well-bred and educated women in their ranks, but often find them more cold-blooded in carrying out some atrocity than their own rank and file are. The mere fact of your being an aristocrat wouldn't seem in the least suspicious to them as long as you didn't try to appear something else, and show at every turn that you're not. Well, if you care to have a go at anything of the sort, I'll get a Foreign Office chap—great friend of mine—to suggest the proper sort of make-up an' then take us down where we'll meet a lot of the most dangerous Reds in London—he knows all about such people an' places because his duties take him among 'em frequ'ntly. I'm rather good at character-parts myself."

"But—what is Your Lordship's idea in going among such rabble?"

"This: There are two men in London who direct all the Red activities in the British Empire. Freddy knows 'em—discusses all sorts of sabotage an' 'direct-action' with 'em—supposed to be one of their own lot, you understand. Well, here are you—a titled Austrian aristocrat—nosing about London and Berlin to find out what you can of international complications. You're convinced that Germany means practical consolidation at once—

which you consider ruinous for your country. You point out to those bolshevists that it's equally bad for them. They've less actual power in Germany than anywhere else, because all Germans are full up with the idea of German commercial organization an' the use of unlimited capital to spread it—wont listen to the beggars when they talk of abolishing capital. Of course they have a radical party there, but it's in the minority and will be even more so when Germany begins to expand again. On the other hand, the radicals control Austria an' Hungary at present. If Germany absorbs your two countries, she'll find means to make the radical influence negligible in them. If the Reds prevent such absorption, they weaken the German idea even in Berlin. The more they destroy German plants, anywhere, the more they hinder German development and expansion. When a woman of your class emphasizes that point to these two London bolshevists, they'll begin to consider it. Sooner or later, they'll send you across the Channel to the dried-up little wizard in Paris who directs bolshevist operations all over the world. If you put the same proposition up to him, and make him see it, things will begin to happen in Vienna and Budapest. If enough of them happen, with sufficiently disastrous consequences, it will delay even a trade consolidation between Berlin and Vienna, indefinitely. As I see the situation, something of the sort is about the only thing that possibly can interfere with Germany's intentions—short of armed force, which nobody wants to see again."

"If there is rioting, clashes of various sorts, a number of people will be killed—"

"Probably not more than automobiles kill every month. Less by many millions than any war would mean."

AT first, the suggestion had been startling to the Baroness—but the more she considered it, the more possible it seemed to discourage trade-expansion with Germany through the very *sabotage* always being demanded by the extremists of the Austrian Government, which had been socialist for the past ten years. The idea intrigued her, increasingly—until she said she would like to attempt the adventure into the lower world at any time His Lordship found it convenient. He said he would call upon her at the end of the week, impersonating an electrician with a fairly good board school education, and fetch with him the F. O. man, as some sort of a mechanic in holiday clothes.

TO her amazement, she utterly failed to recognize the Earl when he did call—her maid telling her that a couple of quite respectable middle-class men were standing in the hall, waiting to see her. A word or two in the Earl's well-remembered voice reassured her, however, when the maid had disappeared, and he started to present the Honorable Freddy—but stopped himself before mentioning the last name, saying they had best commence calling him "Tom Burns" and getting that name fixed in mind so as to prevent slips at some critical moment. "Tom Burns," as it happened, was Earl Lammerford of St. Ives—impersonating a character he had assumed among the Reds before upon several occasions, without their least suspicion of his identity. Trevor himself was "Frank Jeeves"—expert electrician—making very good wages, but in sympathy, more or less, with the Third Internationale.

When she had taken them into a small drawing-room where they couldn't be overheard, they studied her appearance to see what changes might be necessary.

"Tom Burns" commented:

"When a woman of your class does go bolshevik, d'ye see, it's but a short time before she gets a bit careless about such matters as manicuring and silk underthings—wears the silk, you know, but has it laundered much less frequ'ntly. There are usually a few traces of the *grande dame* cropping out, but she does get contaminated with the sort she associates with. I've seen more than one countess in Moscow who looks, today, like a slattern. That's a sketchy idea of about the effect you'll need to produce—but don't overdo it. Suppose you see what you can do in that line—remembering that such women are deuced independent, go about by themselves with a pistol concealed on 'em somewhere, smoke cigarettes much of the time, drink when others are drinking, but usually not to excess because they must be everlastingly on their guard or get the worst of it at once. We'll smoke an' look over these gazettes while we wait."

In less than an hour the Baroness was back—in street clothes of good cut yet not quite those of her class. (She had bought a suit from her maid.) In other

respects she didn't appear so much changed at first glance until they began to notice little subtle features not glaringly in evidence. She was really a born actress and had followed their suggestions almost to the letter. The supposed "Tom Burns" nodded approvingly—asking if she had an automatic where she could get at it.

"Oh, yes—in a holster strapped above my left knee on the inside. With the short skirts we now wear, I could have it out while a man thought I was merely pulling up my stocking. You see, my skirt comes a few inches below my knees."

"Can you shoot?"

"Usually six bull's-eyes out of eight, at twenty paces."

"Very good! You see we're taking you to the attic of an old warehouse at Wapping, overhanging the river-bulkhead—a place where neither the police nor Scotland Yard men care to go unless in force. Pretty low 'pub' in the basement—rag-pickers' loft taking in the whole of the second floor—resort an' sleeping-place of extreme Reds in the attic, which is one large room extending the full length under the high pitched roof. There are plenty of halls in the East End where you'd meet all breeds of the working-classes, including communists and radicals—but the only two men in the United Kingdom with influence to get you an interview with Zenovski, in Paris, are in that old warehouse at Wapping. You probably wouldn't enjoy hobnobbing with the rest in the halls sufficiently to waste the time on 'em.

"If you keep your nerve, there'll be very little danger for any of us, because I'm fairly well known to that lot as a chap with a good bit of influence among my mates—too much of it to antagonize without good reason. But if you should go to pieces, it might be serious. Don't keep strung up to a high pitch—just relax, make up your mind you can master any of them if you have time to think. If anything is sprung on you, take time to think—do nothing hurriedly unless I tell you to run. I can see you're a very good actress—simply remember that the only part you're acting is yourself—a titled Austrian who has gone bolshevik and will do most anything against German encroachment in your country."

WHATEVER the Baroness' previous experience had been in the underworld of Vienna, and dangerous as she had found it, the impression grew upon her that it had been merely pastime compared to the risks and surroundings at Wapping. It was again a partly foggy night, with occasional slinking figures appearing and disappearing in the gloom—street-lamps which were merely blurs of dull illumination for a yard or so, weird far-away toots and the stealthy swirl of rushing water from the river, the silent climbing of enclosed and half rotted stairs with dim ship's-lanterns hanging at the top—then the big attic stretching away to moving, writhing shadows where the roof-beams came down almost to the floor, and grotesque, brutal faces peering up at her as they made their way to the farther end, where two men sat at a table by the dormer window overlooking the river. She remembered that there had been the muttering of a password at the lower door and again at the top of the attic stairs—hearing with considerable relief a somewhat friendly greeting from one of the men to "Tom Burns," as they passed. When they reached the table at which the two men were sitting, Burns said:

" 'Ere's a visitor I've fetched along f'r ye, Levinski—she's by w'y o' bein' a toff in 'er own country—w'ich the sime is Austria—a lidy, d'ye see, but j'ined over to our side because happen she don't like the Berlin lot—wants to give 'em whatfor. I s'y! 'Aven't ye a box or summat she can be sittin' on—an' mebbe a drop or so of ale? Wot?"

The box and the ale were produced—the one not over clean, but the other fresh and cool. Then Burns and Jeeves hunted out boxes for themselves and found when they returned with them that the Baroness was chatting easily with Levinski in Russian, which she appeared to speak fairly well. As the other man was Italian by an English mother, she occasionally switched to English in order that he might get the gist of what she was saying. (For the reader's convenience, we'll omit some of the dialect and foreign accent.) It was this second man who presently asked:

"Just what would be your method of attack? You suggest that we of the Third Internationale are in position to strike telling blows against capitalistic industry in Wien and Buda—that such a move will not only gain credit for us throughout Austria and Hungary but will at the same time materially strengthen our or-

ganization in Germany, where we need all the strength we can get. What do you propose?"

"Here is a list of over fifty industrial plants in the two countries—all of them largely owned in Germany, most of them with German foremen and superintendents, the officers chiefly Austrian or Hungarian. Nearly every one of these plants is running on contract orders which must be shipped on or before a certain date or the contract becomes void. Of course they would be given some margin for unforeseen delays which they couldn't prevent, but a month with no shipments would mean the cancelation of those orders and the placing of them elsewhere. Concerted strikes if they can be maintained, will cripple them very seriously or put them out of business. I do not suggest destroying the machinery at first because my country needs the business, sooner or later—but if it should become necessary in order to stop German encroachment, we may as well make a thorough job of it and rebuild the country afterward on our own pattern."

"Suppose that all our demands are met? Suppose that the owners and managements accede to all our stipulations in the way of hours—wages, working conditions—upon the agreement that we will sign a three-year contract to work on that basis? There is some talk along that line even in Germany; anything to pin us down to a hard and fast basis which will not permit any interruption to the work."

"Would the Internationale sign any such agreement—if all our present demands were met?"

The bolshevists grinned at each other.

"It—would—not! If we can gain so much—as easily as that—we can gain a great deal more! Why not a universal two-hour-day?"

"The work of the world can't be done in any such time as that."

"Then — why not less 'work-of-the-world'? Fewer luxuries, of course—vastly fewer, but we do not need so many of them and do not propose to slave in order that the *bourgeoisie* may have them. What does anybody care about world-progress after he's dead? Why not have more leisure to live our own lives with the minimum of work—need less, have less and be vastly more comfortable?"

"Well, frankly, I think that can be carried too far. I'm used to getting about Europe in a motorcar when and where I please—I'd not like to attempt it on foot. If I tire of London today, I like to feel that there is a plane at Croydon which will set me down in Paris within two or three hours—or comfortable ships which will take me to the ends of the earth. If it is pouring, outside, and I wish to spend the day in a kimono, it's much easier for me to do my marketing over a telephone—or listen to the opera over a radio-set. Once we did without all these things; but the world has moved, and we've become used to them. Often, too, in this game that we play, a woman gets careless of her appearance—lets herself go and thereby loses most of her attraction. But no matter how sloppy a woman becomes, there is always inside of her the desire some day to rehabilitate herself as she knows she *can* be with proper care.

"It's precisely the same with you men! Look at Tchitcherin! The man has the wardrobe of a prince or a millionaire! Well, do you see, all of those things mean, in the mass, work. Many hours of work each day. I tell you in all seriousness that if you advocate in our propaganda—as there is occasionally a hint that you do—a return to the bestial conditions of the Dark Ages with no luxuries or refinements, you'll never get the workingmen of the world to follow you as long as you or they live!

"Whatever profit-sharing, socialistic conditions we may succeed in bringing about through the Internationale, don't let us deceive ourselves with any such insanity as a belief that the world can exist without work—a lot of work! That theory is utter rot! However, you've admitted that you've no idea of concluding any hard and fast agreement with the capitalists—what do you think of my suggestion regarding those industrial plants down there?"

THE two men had been studying her closely as she talked—gradually becoming convinced that she was valuable to the Internationale and impressed by her suggestions.

"It has merit, Frau Baronin. You should see Zenovski, in Paris—put it up to him as you have to us. If he approves, it's merely a matter of settling upon a date and getting word to the employees of all the industrial plants. As a matter of fact, it is rumored that Zenovski has something in mind for next month—just to test out the real strength of the militia-

forces in Austria and Hungary. If he adds your scheme to it, the demonstration may amount to something before it's over. As it happens, you couldn't have chosen a better moment to approach him with anything like this because it may fit in extremely well with his other plans. When could you be in Paris?"

"I can start on one of the morning planes from Croydon."

"Have you sufficient money—so there will be no risk of your being delayed any time in the next few months for the lack of it?"

"In ordinary circumstances—yes. In some unforeseen emergency—possibly not. Since the war my income has dropped until it is barely sufficient to carry me along. Sometimes, of course, I win extra money at bridge or on tips of one sort or another—but that's not dependable. Still—I get along."

"H-m-m—I think it may be wiser for you to have an emergency fund. I will write out a draft for you upon a Russian banking and shipping agent in Cannon Street. If you still have a banker of your own, it would be advisable to cash the draft and deposit the money with him—then the funds can't be traced to the Internationale. If you and Zenovski do not come to an understanding, the money can be returned to me. No—any way you spend it, will be probably more in our favor than against us—do whatever you think best with it."

Levinski took a wallet from his pocket and wrote out a draft for a thousand pounds, which he passed over to her with a note of introduction to Zenovski in Paris. The supposed Tom Burns said that he and Jeeves were going to Paris anyhow and would take her to the house in the little Rue Vanneau used as Red headquarters.

"I think it wise for you to have an emergency fund." He wrote out a draft—passed it to her.

WHEN the Baroness and her companions left Wapping, they took a bus going west until they had gotten well out of the neighborhood—then got down and hailed a taxi in which they were taken to within a block or two of her house, walking to it after the taxi had dropped them. The two Earls were exceedingly complimentary upon her ability as an actress and her manner with the two bolshevists. She was inclined to doubt that any serious opposition to German encroachment would come of it, but they were insistent upon her at least going to Paris with them as had been arranged and having the interview with Zenovski—which she did, although both the East End and the Paris experiences were exceedingly distasteful to her. . . . .

Without going into further details concerning their movements, let us now return to Von Holtz and his activities, as he

sat in his Hamburg office surrounded by the usual up-to-date devices for time-saving and efficiency, for Von Holtz was essentially a keen business man—an industrial leader who truly preferred trade channels to armed force.

One morning, two weeks after the Baroness' visit to Paris, Elsa Schultze—a handsome, highly capable girl who had been Von Holtz's secretary for several years—came into her employer's private office with several sheets of memoranda concerning industrial plants in Vienna and various parts of Hungary—telling him, also, that officials from some of the companies would call upon him a few minutes later.

"You will of course notice, sir, that the output in many of the plants is fifteen or twenty per cent lower than it was during the winter. Some of this may be accounted for by the season—restlessness among operatives—the dropping out of several, here and there. But I have a report from our confidential agent in Budapest which indicates that something more serious is probably brewing—which we may look for before the summer is over."

"Something? Yes? Strikes, I suppose? *Sabotage*, perhaps?"

"All of that—and perhaps serious rioting, he thinks."

"Ah! Look you, Elsa! In the thorough German manner, everything of that sort is provided for in advance. We have—how many strike-breakers now employed in our German and Bavarian plants?"

"Something over two thousand, sir—at last reports."

"All of them men we could put in prison for some military or civil offense if necessary—yes?"

"The offense and all details are duly entered against the name of each man."

"So if the strikers try tampering with his loyalty to us, he's between the devil and the sea—yes? He would not dare betray us—and must fight if we say fight. Yes! Well—we have many strikes before this—but always we handle them in the thorough manner. What plants does the agent think may be most troublesome this summer?"

"Six of them within the Vienna district—possibly a dozen within fifty miles of the city. Twenty in Hungary where there is, if anything, more unrest."

"Very well! You will study out the quickest transportation routes—arrange for tickets and passports in advance. Then we shall see! Now you may let in those gentlemen to see me."

TEN minutes later, there were five business men of quite impressive appearance seated around his desk—well-dressed men of affairs accustomed to responsibility.

"Well, gentlemen," Von Holtz began, "it begins to look as if we are getting closer to an economic basis for handling all Teutonic business. The consolidations which will be completed before the end of the summer mean that instead of competition in foreign markets between Austrian, Hungarian, Czech and German goods, our products will be handled in the mass as if turned out by practically a single coöperative plant. With our available labor, our manufacturing conditions, subsidies lowering ocean freights in German or Austrian bottoms, we are in position to meet and underbid local competition anywhere in the world. How does it look to you?"

"Pretty much as it does to you, Herr von Holtz—and we must compliment you upon great genius for organization. But there are features in such a consolidation which may cause trouble and should not be overlooked. We recognize without argument the immense advantages of consolidation in a solid federation. But the old-line aristocrats never can be made to see it—and we must look for passive resistance from them all the time. Your methods for handling trade conditions seem to be unassailable—unless—they run up against this underground resistance at some point which you cannot sufficiently guard. We are really optimistic, you understand—but feel that it's not going to be altogether a walk-over."

Von Holtz gave a moment or so to thoughtful consideration.

"Well, I have pointed out something of this to my Prussian colleagues, but they laugh at me. They say our methods are thorough enough to handle any contingency which may come up—and they base their arguments upon the presumable common-sense of your people. The whole proposition is so obviously to your advantage as well as to ours that they can't see any serious interference with it."

Within the next few days, Von Holtz and his syndicate had threshed out the details with them of what was to be the greatest merger that German industry ever had seen—if everything went through

without serious interference. Occasional hints of this leaked out as a matter of course. The great news-syndicate controlled by the Trevors got and published information which the Berliners supposed unknown to anybody but a certain few.

There was strenuous denial in the German Press but this didn't altogether convince the other chancellories of Europe.

So matters drifted along into July, when orders came from Paris to three men in Vienna which started something. Elsa Schultze was in Vienna at the time—visiting not only the offices of Von Holtz's syndicate there, but also a number of the industrial plants whose officials, knowing of her confidential relations with the master-mind of the consolidation, showed her plainly that they were becoming apprehensive, and gave their reasons.

"New demands are being made by the workers' committees, Miss Schultze, which are too absurd even to consider. Had they been anywhere at all within reason, we would have strongly advised granting them under even a two-year contract—but they have the impudence to demand a six-hour day—a five-day week—and a thirty per cent advance in wages. Our contracts for goods would mean a dead loss of twenty per cent at those figures—the proposition is simply out of the question!"

"And—if you refuse?"

"A walk-out in at least twenty-five plants at the end of next week."

"Approximately—how many men altogether?"

"Possibly six thousand—probably four or five. We have hopes that some of the non-union men will stick—if there is any way of protecting them."

"Suppose we have a thousand strike-breakers in Vienna upon the morning when the men walk out—and another thousand in the Budapest neighborhood? Could you keep running with that many?"

"Why—yes—I think so, if your strike-breakers were not run off or intimidated by the strikers. Of course that would be only enough to keep in operation the plants where we now anticipate trouble—probably not to full capacity, at that. If the men of other plants go out, they'll have to shut down."

IN a Vienna beer-cellar over near the river, a number of young men and girls had been dropping in every evening during May and June, presumably for the excellent music and beer, as the place was too thoroughly packed with tables to leave room for dancing. To Burns and Jeeves, however—who had taken the Baroness there several times—the crowd appeared always made up of the same faces, and they soon began to notice three men with whom several others sat down to confer at various times. These—as Burns told the Baroness in the seclusion of her own house—were Zenovski's chief agents in Austria, and had all the details for a general strike under way.

Borolyi, who seemed to be the man in supreme authority, had met the supposed Tom Burns and also Jeeves in other cities upon previous occasions—knew them as English radicals with a good deal of influence—knew that any woman they brought with them to such a place must be the mysterious Baroness who had been largely instrumental in persuading Zenovski to make the proposed strike an affair of much larger proportions than had been intended.

Stopping by their table, one evening while the orchestra was playing its loudest, Borolyi asked for an introduction—saying he would like to propose a toast to her as one who had thrown class overboard and accomplished so much toward their cause. But Jeeves, speaking in Russian, pointed out that it would be much too dangerous for her to be generally known.

"Impossible to be certain there are no spies in this cellar you know, Borolyi! If her identity remains unsuspected, she's in position to get a good bit of information which we would find it impossible to obtain. If she becomes known and associated with your crowd, some of her own lot will certainly shoot her very shortly. It wont do at all! She's much too valuable to the Internationale. Ask Zenovski her name if you like—but I'll wager he'll not tell it to you. He jolly well knows her value to him! If any questions are asked, you'd best not admit that Burns and I belong to your crowd, actively—say you know we're in sympathy with your cause and bring the lady with us merely by way of a little slumming, with no knowledge of who she may be mixin' with You see it yourself, do you not, old chap?"

"H-m-m—probably you're right after all, Jeeves. No—I hadn't thought of her personal risk before. Better let it go as you say. But we'll keep an eye out for her safety in case we see her in trouble anywhere. By the way—you've met and

talked with Von Holtz, I understand—in London? Isn't he really the head of this syndicate which is interested in so many Austro-Hungarian plants—means to bring about a consolidation?"

"From what I've managed to pick up about the man, I'm fairly positive of that. He's a born organizer—exceptionally able man in that line."

"What's he likely to do when we call the strike?"

"Rush two or three thousand strike-breakers in here at once—men who'll come armed and wont listen to any arguments of yours."

"H-m-m—that's more than I thought he'd be able to get at a pinch! We'll have to consider that point and make arrangements to cover it. If he prefers active fighting, we'll give him a taste of it. We may have to destroy the plants after all!"

"Looks a little that way. But I'd not do it unless you're compelled to—because this country needs those plants, after you drive the Prussians out of them. What's this I hear about the *bourgeoisie* in the country provinces getting their militia under arms to march on Vienna and Buda if your little disturbance begins to look serious?"

"They're afraid of a communist dictatorship—wont stand for it. And they're much too strong for us to fight. But we'll stir up enough of a row to make them do some thinking and tell 'em we're merely resisting Prussian absorption—they'll be with us on that, and of course a labor strike isn't a political affair anyhow."

BY the time the eventful Thursday arrived, the strike-breakers were already in the city. When the day-shift quit at five o'clock and the night-shift failed to appear, the strike-breakers drifted in by twos and threes, bringing their luggage with them and preparing to remain on the premises, where arrangements had been made to feed and sleep them—truck-loads of mattresses, camp-stoves, cooking utensils and provisions coming in through the factory gates after dark. As the strikers hadn't believed that anything of the sort could have been so perfectly organized in advance of the event, they lost the first trick by not being on hand to destroy the trucks and their contents.

Borolyi hadn't been looking for the strike-breakers before the next day—hadn't watched the stations closely enough, or the up-river steamers from Buda, to find out that they were already in the city, in cheap lodging-houses. But the sound of whirring machinery told him next morning what had happened. After a consultation with his executives, he ordered a walk-out in twenty-seven more plants, making fifty-two in all, and commenced throwing up barricades in the Vienna streets.

As none of the strike-breakers appeared outside of the factory property and the daily output, apparently, was being stored on the premises until it could be more safely taken away under convoy, for shipment, Borolyi stationed a number of his men where they were protected by the factory walls and doorways, and began throwing bombs through the windows. Two planes, which he commandeered from the Republican army, dropped heavier bombs upon the plants from overhead—flying low enough to be certain of hitting them. A number of rifle-shots were fired at these planes by the strike-breakers but they were too much terrified by the terrific explosions within the buildings to score a single hit.

All Friday morning, Von Holtz and his secretary were in Munich, getting reports by telephone of what was occurring southeast of them. The bombing was something he hadn't anticipated. His first thought was to send down a dozen of the commercial planes owned by his Syndicate and give the strikers a taste of the same medicine wherever they could be located—but Elsa pointed out the folly of that.

"It would be an act of war, sir—antagonizing even the Austrian business men who have agreed to the consolidation with you! They'll approve of your strike-breakers if they act strictly in self-defense but they wont support you in what would look like attempted revolution. In fact, that would solidify both countries against you."

"Hmph! . . . . Elsa, you have a good head—you talk sense! Well—there is a way of handling situations like this—we must discover it. First—they must agree—those Austrian friends of ours—that a Federation police guard is necessary. Not an army, you understand—just police—drafted from all three countries to handle strikes, riots, all disturbances against constituted authority. You think they will agree to that?"

"If this strike gets any more serious

Half a dozen shots came from the darkness. Three went into Von Holtz's body.

than it is now, they'll have to. Either their Government can preserve law and order or it can't."

"And if conditions get too chaotic or revolutionary, Germany just comes down and intervenes to bring about law and order. Yes?"

"You'll have Geneva on your neck if she does! The other nations are apprehensive enough over the prospect of your trade consolidation, as it is. If you try to annex Austria-Hungary by force it means another war—there isn't any question about that! And instead of having them as Allies this time, they'd be against you to a man. It would simply work out as Germany and Russia against the world. From the American point of view you'd not only lose but it would be more quickly and far more disastrously than before. No—as I see it, you'll win about everything you hope for if you can handle this industrial situation down there. If you can't handle it—no Germanic federation for a good many years at least. Looks to me like a much more serious task than you anticipated."

"Hmph! We go to Wien on the first plane we get!"

"It's a risk, sir! You're known to be the brains and prime-mover in all this. If they eliminate you, it delays what you're planning—indefinitely."

"Foolishness! I'm trying to put these countries on their feet, financially! They would be fools to kill me! Nonsense!"

FROM Friday to Sunday Vienna was in a state of siege, with barricades thrown across her streets. On Monday, Borolyi published advertisements in the papers calling upon all Magyars and Austrians to defend their country against foreign encroachment—peaceably, if possible—forcibly, if they must. The barricades were taken down and the normal activities of the city resumed as far as outward appearances went. The money spent by the tourists was needed too much to permit of warnings that either city or country were unsafe for foreigners to visit. But under the surface, there was something like a seething volcano.

When Von Holtz reached Vienna with his secretary and went to his Syndicate offices in the Ringstrasse, the clerks and officials there could not report a single factory which was actually running. Fifteen had been destroyed so that they would have to be rebuilt, with new machinery, before anything could be produced in them. Even some of the city's finest buildings had been burned. In twenty other factories throughout the provinces, the strike-breakers were occupying the buildings in a state of siege—

having been warned that any attempt to run the machinery would bring prompt destruction from aerial bombing. In the remainder, the strikers themselves were in possession of the plants with machine-guns, and no strike-breakers could have forced their way in without a bloody fight.

VON HOLTZ, after going over the entire situation with the Vienna manager, saw himself nearer complete defeat than ever before in his life—and it rankled.

"Look here, Schneider! What are the chances of our being able to place operatives in those factories and run them?"

"Very slim, sir—the plants will be destroyed if you do."

"Very well—what are the chances of our being able to make some working agreement with the strikers and start up again?"

"None at all—upon any basis which would permit a profit on the goods! What do you think Borolyi's last suggestion is? That the Government issue twenty-year bonds and buy up all outside interests in every industrial plant throughout the country—the plants to be run by the Government upon a coöperative basis!"

"Good *night!* He's crazy! Come now—what are you Austrian business men going to do about this? . . . . Let the best chance you've ever had for putting the country on its feet go by the board—and sell it to a lot of loafing radicals?"

"Frankly, Von Holtz—we don't see our way out of it at all! You Germans have several millions tied up in these industrial plants—what are you going to do? Sell out—and drop them?"

"Hmph! You do not understand the German way, my friend—although you come from Hanover yourself. Germany never drops anything! Sell out? . . . . Not by a damned sight! We retain our ownership in every foot of this property down here—holding your Government responsible for all damage done. For the present, we lose on interest account—close it up—let the machinery lie idle. Sooner or later, conditions here will change. When that time comes, we open up again—that's all. We lose on interest and deterioration. You lose on both—and the entire income besides. It is more of a losing proposition for you Austrians and Hungarians than for anyone else! Have it your own way! I have other matters to interest me. Suit yourselves!"

IT had not been supposed that Von Holtz and his Syndicate would at once sell out for a bond-issue—but the communists all thought they would do so, as the best of a bad bargain, within a few weeks. When, therefore, the Prussian's contemptuous refusal to even consider such a proposition became generally known, a wave of bitter rage and disappointment ran over the country from Vienna to the Carpathians. His syndicate was in position to pocket whatever loss it had to and close up the plants indefinitely—but the former employees were in no position to live without wages beyond a very limited period. To destroy the plants as a matter of spite would only make their case that much worse.

This, then, was the situation when Von Holtz took it into his head to visit one of the plants in the city which was being held by the strike-breakers—accompanied by Elsa Schultze, who refused to let him go alone. It is probable that he had been followed every time he left his hotel, though he was unconscious of it. As it happened, the watchman at the gate of the plant didn't know him and refused to open it. While they were standing there under the single arc-lamp over the gate, half a dozen shots came from the darkness just beyond. The watchman got one of them through the head, between the bars of the gate—another grazed Elsa's side—three more went into Von Holtz's body.

QUITE by accident, the two Earls and the Baroness had spotted the industrial magnate going down the side street leading to the factory, with the girl, and had followed them. Waiting but a moment, until two of the police came running up, they approached the group. Elsa was sitting on the pavement with her employer's head in her lap—though he had died almost instantly.

The girl was weeping as she looked up into the Baroness' face.

"Did you know him?" asked Elsa.

"Yes—yes—I had—met him frequently. We saw you both coming down this way and followed, thinking it was a foolish risk after the warnings in the papers. You were his secretary, I think?"

"Yes—and—something more. He was a big man—bigger than any of these poor fools ever dreamed. I—I hope that my child may inherit the brains of his father—when he grows up!"

The Old Leader

By Bigelow Neal

The able author of "The Field of Amber Gold" and "Captain Jack" here contributes an unusual story of North Dakota ranch life.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

TAMERLANE had made an enemy. The great Hereford had reigned supreme on the range of the 4X for years. His more than ton of bone and muscle encased in its mighty sheath of almost impenetrable hide had carried him to victory again and again, had carried him to the point where none cared to dispute his path. He had become a four-hoofed overlord of the prairies. With strength and confidence and unquestioned leadership had come that which so often comes to the truly strong—gentleness and patience. In moments of anger his eyes might still glow red, the tips of his polished horns might still flash in the sunlight, but faith in himself had bred tolerance and the red light of battle soon changed to the mildness of brown and the fighting arch of his powerful neck soon fell until the saber points of his horns turned upward as a sign of peace.

Once it seemed that he had outlived his usefulness and he had been condemned to the horrors of the Eastern stockyards; but on the first lap of the long trail to the East he had stolen away in the darkness of night, returning to the 4X in time to check the ravages of a mountain lion in a pen of purebred calves. For that he had been awarded his freedom to roam the prairies at certain seasons and a pen of his own with hay and grain, at others. And now, when the great heart of Tamerlane was at peace with all the world, through no fault of his own, he had made a dangerous enemy and against that enemy the ponderous bulk of the Hereford could be of no avail. For one Jake Muldoon had threatened his life; had cursed him savagely and threatened death should he ever meet the Hereford on the range away from the protection of the regular crew of the 4X.

THE quarrel had its origin in the unfairness and ungovernable rage of Jake Muldoon. Jake was a tenderfoot and coming to the 4X, had been assigned such work as a man without experience might do. He was given a gentle horse and such simple duties as bringing in the cows at night, herding the saddle-horses that belonged at headquarters, and feeding and leading Tamerlane to water twice a day.

One evening as the man and the Hereford passed the cookhouse on the way to the creek, Jake was seized with a desire to show off. There were two reasons for his conduct. Both of them worked in the kitchen. To show how bold he was and how far a month's experience had gone toward making him a fearless cow-puncher, Muldoon vaulted to the broad back of his charge. So far all right; Tamerlane had no objection and never altered his pace. Then Jake bethought himself of raking the flanks of the big Hereford with his spurs. That, he thought, would look real tough and perhaps win some sign of admiration from the kitchen window. Time and again had Tamerlane's hide withstood far worse things than those spurs. The rowels hardly scratched but they did have another effect—they tickled. With a snort of disgust the old fellow broke into a lumbering trot while the tenderfoot on his back bounced around like a tub of butter. Coming to the creek, the Hereford stopped. Muldoon slid along his back and out on to the powerful neck. Tamerlane dropped his head and the ice-cold spring water parted with a surge of foam and closed again with a dull splash. Down into the cold, green depths went the spraddled form of Jake Muldoon. When he waded ashore he had lost his watch, his jack-knife, his dignity and his temper. The fact that there were heads framed in the cookhouse window, that a roar of laughter came from the bunkhouse, and that Tamerlane was drinking calmly where he had stopped, added nothing to the spiritual harmony of the occasion. The worst in Jake Muldoon came uppermost and he made a threat: Once away from the ranch he would kill Tamerlane on sight!

IT was on a day late in the fall, during that balmy but treacherous spell of weather which the cow-men call a second Indian Summer, that Tamerlane was allowed the liberty of the big corrals for exercise. The morning had been one of sunshine and unusual warmth. At noon it was still warm for the season but a shifting breeze had sprung up carrying the merest suggestion of a chill. The Hereford lay far out in the corral basking in the sunshine, the satin finish of his brown hide shimmering like burnished metal, while in startling contrast the curly white of his head and neck glittered like sunlight on a morning frost.

When the breeze came Tamerlane was chewing his cud, eyes half closed, and sometimes his head sagged and swung around toward his shoulder as if even the slight effort required to hold his head erect were too much for his dreamy state of mind. And then the current of air coming over the long sheds stirred the tassel-like curls on the broad, white forehead. Instantly a change came over the big fellow. Swallowing the object of his monotonous chewing, he swung his head into the wind and drew his upper lip into a series of horizontal wrinkles. Inhaling a deep breath he expelled it again with a sharp hiss and from the air streaming over the sensitive lining of his nostrils came distinct impressions which followed one another in rapid succession to his brain. He caught the pungent tang of smoke from a far-off prairie fire; the scent of buffalo-grass and sage, withered under the frosts of fall; and the dank smell of water-grass waving in the marshes far to the north and west.

Restlessly he arose and with a ponderous hoof threw clouds of dust above his back. Again his lungs expanded and closed. Now he recognized the multiple life-scents on the prairie, all of which he had known in his more active days when he was free to roam the range and chief among them, one that spoke of great herds of his own kind moving wild and free somewhere far up toward the wind. He was moving now, answering the combative call of the prairie or answering some urge of his wilder nature just as men sometimes thrill in answer to the roar of the coming storm.

A thousand times the stout bars of cottonwood at the gate had turned him back but now they snapped like pipe-stems, in a series of pistol shots, and he was free. Knowing nothing of the death that might be lurking on the prairie, nothing of the hatred in the heart of Jake

Muldoon, Tamerlane turned his head into the wind and heading out on to the prairie broke into a lumbering trot. . . . .

From a clay-capped crest far above the valley of Clear Creek, Jake Muldoon studied the valley below.

Hours had passed since old Chuck McArthur, foreman of the 4X, had sat his horse by the tenderfoot's side and issued his final instructions. They were simple enough. Pointing down toward the herd which spread like an ever-shifting carpet of brown along the shore of the stream, Chuck said: "The boss picked up this bunch somewhere north of the 'Height o' Land.' They're newcomers here and don't know the range. They've had a shot of blackleg dope and we don't want to mix 'em with the main herd 'til we're sure they didn't bring the disease along. Hold 'em along the creek today and sometime before dark I'll send some of the night crew to watch 'em till morning."

With the last words, McArthur moved along the hog-back which led to the hills and vanished behind another peak.

Jake found a place on the southern slope where the sun had warmed the clay and, because he took his duties very lightly, lay down to sleep. At noon he awoke with a chill. The sun seemed somehow to have lost its power. Instead of a glaring, warmth-giving globe in the heavens it had become merely a copper disk, so dimmed was it by the intervening mists. A cold breeze had driven away the warm air and the tenderfoot shivered as he unwrapped his sweater from the slicker-roll on his saddle.

Turning for a last survey of the horizon before going down into the valley, the herder noticed that the sky in the west had changed to something very nearly resembling a wavering curtain. To the north and the east had come no change,

Tamerlane dropped his head; down into the cold, green depths went Muldoon.

nor to the south for that matter, but as he swung in the latter direction and strained his eyes over the valley and across the prairie beyond, he saw a moving speck against the skyline. For a time he stood motionless. Unquestionably it was an animal of some kind, an animal whose color was brown and white. Because the soul of Jake Muldoon had not yet expanded to the call of the cow-country, his face hardened and the glaze of self-nursed hatred came to his eyes. He took his rifle from its scabbard and slipped a cartridge into the chamber.

DOWN in the valley he found a tiny hollow where buffalo-berry bushes shut off the breeze. There he huddled against the still warm face of a boulder and ate his lunch, the cow-man's inevitable sandwich of bacon and bread. For a time his thoughts were on the great white-face and the revenge he intended to take—and that within the hour. Then his eyes, untrained to the ways of the

prairie though they were, began to record strange changes taking place about him. Somehow he sensed an off-note, a feeling of danger. Evidently the wild-folk felt it too, for the herd stopped grazing and began to shift toward a common center; a flock of teal arose from a pond nearby, surged upward in spiraling flight, to swing into a V-shaped formation against the blue dome above, and dart southward beyond the range of vision; the whistling cries of the ground-squirrels, the eternal croaking of magpies broke off sharply, and even the grasshoppers ceased their shrill notes and over the vast spread of prairie a silence fell, deep and oppressive. The wild things knew, as a genuine cowman would have known, that nature was sounding a warning—but Jake Muldoon could not interpret the menacing signs about him.

It was now mid-afternoon. The sun had already dropped behind the western peaks when it happened. Muldoon sat his horse by the side of his herd waiting and watching for something, he knew not what. Suddenly as if a master hand had opened a switch, twilight blotted out the light of day. There was no warning, no transition period between light and dark, apparently night had come, on the heels of noon.

Nervously the tenderfoot peered over the shadowy forms before him. They seemed to feel the new threat as well as himself, for their ranks tightened and a plaintive bellowing broke the silence which had now become terrifying. Glancing upward the herder beheld the cause of it all. From the west, rushing over the valley on the wings of an higher air current, all the more awe-inspiring because of its utterly silent progress, came a twisting, writhing mantle of blue-black clouds.

FEAR gripped hard at the heart of Jake Muldoon then. Often had he read of the prairie blizzards and full well he knew that the angel of death rides ever on the crest of those storms and in blind unreasoning terror he drove the spurs against his horse. Nothing mattered now. Forgotten was the herd in his charge; forgotten all but the fear of death and the silent shroud of darkness gathering above the valley. With rein and spur he urged his horse ahead, urged him to a trot, to a gallop and then suddenly he halted—he knew no north, no south, nor east nor west. Under the gloom of the approaching storm the peaks had lost themselves. He could not tell one from another.

He was paralyzed by the knowledge that he had lost his sense of direction and sat his horse clutching hard at the horn of the saddle. His horse and the saddle alone remained tangible; all else had passed into the twilight of the unreal.

And now, at last, a sound, something to break the terrible silence—a sigh that increased rapidly in volume until it became a hiss, sweeping over him, engulfing him—the driving of rain and sleet on the grass and leaves.

Hastily he reached for his slicker and with the necessity for action came a measure of self-possession. His panic had partly subsided, for rain and sleet were rain and sleet no matter how angry the appearance of their source, and once within the glistening, yellow folds he somehow felt safer. Perhaps his fear had been ungrounded. Surely the foreman would remember and in time some one would come. As he turned back a new phase in the scheme of things began. The swish of rain and sleet died out; the steel-blue lines turned to a wavering white; and by the time he reached the edge of the herd again, the air was full of softly falling snow.

THE darkness seemed to lift for a moment when the snow came and he could see halfway across the herd. Although he knew the temperature to be falling rapidly he was still warm beneath his slicker and he felt better, much better until he noted the utter sameness of everything around him. Almost before he had time to realize what was happening, the hills, the valley, the herd and even the air itself had turned to a deadly monotonous white. He saw himself as only a speck in a vast void of swirling, sweeping flakes of white. This time the fear which spurred him into action was more rational. Somewhere he had heard that cattle would always find a place of safety in any kind of a storm and he began urging them into a compact bunch, preparatory to driving them out.

Hours later he was still holding his place by the herd. He was there because the cattle would not move and he knew of nothing else to do. Darkness was coming fast; the encompassing white was turning to gray and now was freezing, for

his slicker stood out stiff and rigid while he could hear the tinkle of ice against the rowels of his spurs. The snow had ceased to melt and was piling deep in the grass and buckbrush, muffling the footfalls of his horse and the clicking of hoofs among the herd.

And now the storm gods had set the scene. They were ready for the last act. The snow began to lift and swirl in aimless eddies and a low moan came through the wall of snow. Jake Muldoon remembered of tales he had heard in the bunkhouse and by the camp-fires on the range. That moan was the voice of the coming blizzard and when it came the generous, laughing prairies would swing, sharp-set, into a land of walking death.

Again, in terror, he screamed at the sluggish cattle. Again and again he charged against their ranks. They gave way ever so slightly. Drawing his revolver he emptied it into the air. They were moving faster now. He emptied the magazine of his rifle; he yelled and cursed at the top of his voice and he had them on the run. A cry of triumph trembled and died in his throat. Running, yes—but milling. They were revolving like a great wheel whose hub was the compact and confused center of the herd. Recognizing defeat he cried out in fear and exasperation and threw the empty rifle in the face of a passing steer. Then the moan rose to a shriek; the white carpet of the prairies sprang into the air; the wind turned cold as the breath of ice is cold; and the storm was upon him. Thus, upon the prairie of the West, nature sometimes opens the fourth and the last act in the cycle of the seasons.

JAKE MULDOON who, driven by false pride and the desire for revenge, would have killed Tamerlane without mercy, knew now that he himself stood on the threshold of death. No aid could ever come to him through that storm. There seemed no help for him for he knew of no way to care for himself, but instinctively he was hanging to the edge of the herd, feeling that these living creatures that had, a few minutes before, aggravated him to exasperation, were his friends. And although he did not know it, his only hope of life lay in the herd still revolving before him, for even then a great, shapeless, snow-covered figure came from the hills and merged with the herd. In a moment it had turned and gone again, thrusting its way through the milling cattle. And now the wheel began to unwind as a spool gives up its yarn. Away into the raging storm stretched a slender, everlengthening line. It was truly a life-line and when the spool had spun itself out Jake was hanging desperately to the end. Before him, behind him and on either side as well, was a sweeping, driving, almost solid wall of snow. Then night came and utter darkness, deep and impenetrable, fell about him.

It was a belated cow-puncher leaving the corrals at the 4X who gave the alarm. It was cow-punchers pouring from the bunkhouse that caused lanterns to dart here and there like the orange-glow of fireflies. It was the great white shadow leading the way across the bottoms, that caused the life-line to wind slowly within the corrals and sheds. At the end came a staggering, half-frozen man.

A little later Jake Muldoon lay on his bunk listening to the roar of the storm and watching the warm lights from the heater play over the faces of his mates as they recalled wild tales of other storms. Chuck McArthur was telling of a man who had been caught in a blizzard in his own pasture and how they had found him kneeling in the snow, frozen to death, with his hands cut to ribbons by the barbed-wire. The tenderfoot shuddered and crawled deep beneath his blankets. Some one told of a blizzard after which frozen cattle and horses stood upright on the prairie until the warm days of spring thawed their legs and let them fall.

"And let me tell you, young feller, nothing in God's world saved your worthless life tonight but that wise old son-of-a-gun of a Tamerlane! He's the guy that brought you home. If he hadn't we'd 'a' bin watching the drifts in the spring to see which one kept you from the coyotes!"

For a long while Jake Muldoon tossed about in his bunk. The lights were out and the rest of the men were asleep when at last he sat up in bed. A few moments later, clad in wool and sheepskin coat, he was out in the storm again struggling through the deep drifts and against the raging wind. In the shed he found Tamerlane and the big Hereford rose slowly at the tug of the rope on his horns. A sharp tussle with wind and snow; the doors of the big barn opened and closed.

Tamerlane had made another friend.

Crystals of Crime

By LEMUEL DE BRA

Swift action and more of it flames through this fine novelette of San Francisco's underworld by the author of "A Thunderin' Thriller" and "The Return of Stiletto Sofie."

THE jangling of the telephone on the stand at the head of my bed startled me out of a sound sleep. Confused for a moment, I sat up, listening. Through the open windows I could see a crescent moon hanging low over Twin Peaks, the fog racing in off the Pacific. At once I became aware of that hush that settles over San Francisco between three and five in the morning. Suspecting that I knew who was calling at that heathenish hour, I reached for the phone and answered sleepily. I was not surprised when the Chief's voice leaped at me from the receiver: "Get dressed, Dean! I'm on my way! By!"

I muttered something, but Ralph had already hung up. That was his way. It wasn't pull that had made Ralph Hardy chief of the U. S. Narcotic Squad; it was *push*. He was always thinking and acting a jump or two ahead of the rest of us.

As I got into my clothes I wondered what was up. For months we had been working day and night at routine jobs. Not one "big catch." Just a monotonous grind of petty court-cases. There were rumors of a new cocaine crowd, and I knew that Ralph had been working hard on that; but rumors were all we had been able to get.

I had unlocked my door and was about ready when Ralph walked in.

"Hello, slave-driver!" I called out. "Thought you said you'd give me one night for sleeping!"

RALPH grunted. He was looking at me with that far-away stare in his eyes. I knew he hadn't heard what I had said. He was a character, that man. I remember how classy he always looked in evening dress, with his broad shoulders, deep chest, slim waist and well-set

Illustrated by
Paul Lehman

He hurled himself straight at me. With terrific force his head drove into my stomach.

head, and his versatility was a constant source of amazement to me. Whatever part he was called upon to play, he fitted right in as if he had been born to it.

"Dean," said Ralph, "you remember Kitty Enright—the pretty kid who got on the dope through Greaseball Mazetti? Did she use C?"

"She did," I replied. That was one of the reasons Ralph usually kept me with him. He was a man who worked for results—leaving petty details to me. "Kitty sometimes used heroin," I added, "but usually it was crystal cocaine."

"*Crystal cocaine,*" echoed Ralph, that far-away look still in his eyes. "I wonder—" He broke off, then snapped out abruptly: "What're you waiting for? If you're ready, let's go!"

"I'm ready," I told him. I slipped my handcuffs in my pocket and parked the old government .38 in its shoulder holster. Downstairs I found that Ralph had a taxi waiting.

"I went to a wild party tonight," Ralph said, as we dropped down the hill toward what was then known as the "uptown tenderloin." "Thought I'd get a line on that new coke crowd; but I pulled a blank. When I got to my room I found a message from Kitty. I gave her a ring, but she couldn't talk over the phone. She seems upset about something. I told her I'd be right down. While we're talking, you keep still and get an earful. You hear?"

"If I don't know my tomatoes by this time, you'd better can me," I said peevishly, then the taxi was at the curb and we were getting out. Ralph paid the driver and dismissed him. I saw the man eying Ralph shrewdly and I remember wondering if he knew us. I felt his gaze on us as Ralph and I entered the hotel on the corner. A smart lot, those owl-taxi drivers are; but Ralph and I had long ago learned not to let them know too much about our business. The hotel on the corner, of course, was not the hotel where Kitty lived. We walked in the front entrance, crossed the lobby to the side exit, and hurried down that street half a block to what was then the Maxine Hotel.

THE lobby of this hotel was as busy at that hour as the better-known hotels were at the middle of the day. Taxi-drivers, off duty, mingled with café musicians, entertainers, hat-checkers—men and women of the night life. The clerk, a wooden-faced individual who I happened to know had a police record, eyed us suspiciously as we approached the desk.

"I'm Mr. Worthington," Ralph lied glibly. "Lady in 507 is expecting us."

The clerk nodded his head toward the automatic elevator. "Go right up, Mr.—er—Worthington."

We stepped in. I closed the door and pressed the button. "Ralph," I said, "you didn't fool that bird. I bet he was listening in when you phoned Kitty. And he seems to know you. We should have sneaked—"

"If we had tried to sneak up, we'd have been seen. That's one reason why that bird is on the job. And Kitty would have been put out tomorrow. She's risking enough, having us come here. Did you see the clerk signal to that bird trying to hide his mug behind a *Chronicle?* No, of course not!"

I was too ashamed for reply. I had learned a few things in the years I had worked with Ralph, but I was always missing something that Ralph seemed to see even with his eyes shut.

Ralph tapped lightly on the door of 507. It swung back at once. Kitty put a finger to her carmined lips and beckoned us in, closed and locked the door.

"'Lo, Kitty," said Ralph. "What's on your mind? Guess you remember Dean?"

Kitty nodded to me, and smiled. She was attractive, that girl, at first glance; but I had learned to read beneath the surface grooming. And to me there was something tragic and pitiful in the girl's white face and tired eyes. Kitty had come from a good home, but had had the misfortune to meet Horatio Mazetti, then posing on forged letters as a wealthy New York importer. Eventually we unmasked Mazetti as a society dope-peddler known in the underworld as "Greaseball."

The girl motioned us to seats, then dropped wearily into a chair. From the table she took what I saw was the last edition of the *Chronicle.* Laying the paper in her lap, she looked up at Ralph.

"Have you seen this, Mr. Hardy?"

"Not yet," Ralph replied. "Just got home from a party and found your call. What's up?"

"Enough! But wait till I tell you." Kitty took a cigarette, lighted it and inhaled deeply. Then, suddenly, she sat up. Her eyes narrowed; a hard look came into her face. Abruptly she dropped into the slang of the underworld.

"Say! You remember that swell wop, Greaseball Mazetti? Of course! Well, listen! I'm hat-check captain at the Trotter's Café. See? At about nine this evening Mazetti blows in. I'm thinkin' he's been out o' jail about two months, but that's the first time he's showed up at the Trotter's. Lookin' swell, he is! And leanin' on his wing is a twist who hasn't eyes for a thing in the world but him. A pretty kid with blonde hair and that schoolgirl complexion. It makes me sick. I think of what that dope-shooter did to me, and I want to choke him!"

Ralph nodded. Kitty took another draw on her cigarette, then went on.

"Well, I get a hunch that something's going to happen. I don't know what it is, but I just feel all trembly inside, if you know what I mean. And I don't know what to do. I never thought of calling you, even if I could 'a' got away to do it. So, like a fool, I do nothing. And now look at this!"

She handed Ralph the paper, with her cigarette indicating a "flash" story. Ralph's gaze rested on the paper a moment; then he read aloud:

"'*GIRL KILLED ON GREAT HIGHWAY*

"'The body of an unidentified girl was found lying on the rocks just off the Great Highway opposite the Oriental Lodge shortly after midnight by Mounted Policeman Jerry O'Brien. Police describe the girl as pretty, about eighteen, with blue eyes and blonde hair. Apparently the girl was crossing the Highway when she was struck by a passing car and hurled off the road to the rocks below, causing instant death. The body was removed to the morgue.'"

FROWNING, Ralph looked up from the paper.

"And you think that's the girl you saw with Mazetti, eh? What makes you so sure? What time did Mazetti and the girl leave the Trotter's?"

"About ten o'clock. I saw Slim Morris, of the Limousine Service, come in and

speak to the captain. The captain goes over to Mazetti's table, and they get up and follow Slim out."

"Didn't the girl or Mazetti check anything with you?"

"No. And I thought of that. When they first came in, Mazetti saw me and I saw him. He grabs the girl's arm and beats it for a table. They don't dance, and don't order anything but ginger-ale; but they sure do a lot o' talking."

Ralph looked down at the paper again. "And you say they left about ten. Two hours later—if this is the same girl—she is killed while crossing the Great Highway. I don't see anything suspicious about that, Kitty. Evidently the girl was in the Oriental Lodge and took a notion to walk over to the beach—just as several thousand other people do every night. A car struck her and killed her."

"Maybe," said Kitty, with an insinuating lift of her head. "Remember she was with Greaseball Mazetti."

Ralph considered that a moment in silence, his gaze on Kitty's face. "Kitty," he said suddenly, "are you telling me the whole thing—everything you know about this?"

"Everything," Kitty answered quickly.

"You're lying," said Ralph quietly. "I wonder why. Kitty, do you know anything about this new coke crowd the town is talking about?"

"I don't; but I'll bet Greaseball Mazetti is in it. As for me lying to you, why shouldn't I? I got to look out for myself. I want you to get Mazetti; but I don't want Mazetti to get me. See? All right! I'm giving you a tip that if you follow it up right it—well, it'll be curtains for Greaseball!"

Again Ralph was silent a moment; then he turned to me. "Dean, get the Limousine Service. Ask for Slim Morris. Get him over here. We'll have him run us down to the morgue. Want to go along, Kitty?"

"Not so's you could notice it!"

"We might send for you anyway. You know this is a police case—so far. I can't butt in without more grounds than you've given me. I'll see what Captain Creave has learned since that flash story was phoned in."

Night Captain of Detectives Dan Creave showed no surprise when we walked in. Early morning calls at his office were nothing unusual for us. He was reading a morning paper, his feet on his desk, a half-smoked cigar between his teeth. Ralph told him our business, and the Captain's feet hit the floor with a bang.

"Say, how'd you know about that girl?"

"Saw it in the *Chronicle*," Ralph replied cautiously. "What's the latest?"

"The latest development in this mysterious case is that two star Government dicks have come to my office at four-thirty A. M. to inquire about it. Why are you birds interested? Dope case? Or do you know the girl?"

Ralph shook his head. "Just curious, Captain. That's all."

"Curious, your grandmother! Say, if you know anything we don't, spill it quick! I got every man on the homicide squad out o' bed to work on the case. You see, we thought at first that the girl had been struck by a car while she was crossing the Highway. No, sir! That girl was robbed, murdered—then *thrown from a car!*"

CHAPTER II

I REMEMBER the startled look that flashed into Ralph's face as Captain Creave calmly dropped that bombshell. Then Ralph flung me a swift glance, and I knew that the thought in my mind was also in his. Did Kitty Enright know all this? Was that what she had been holding back?

"Captain," said Ralph, drawing up a chair, "I may be able to help you. First, tell me all you know so far."

"Well," Creave began, "as I said, O'Brien thought at first that the girl had been struck by a car. Then he discovered that earrings, or pendants, had been brutally torn from her ears. Right away then he looked at her fingers. They showed the marks of rings, but the rings were gone. He found no purse, no vanity bag, nothing of that sort. Marks on the rocks and gravel showed that the girl was thrown from a car that was going north at high speed. Of course, O'Brien considered the possibility of the girl having been killed by a passing car and afterward robbed. The body was in plain sight from the Highway. But Doc Emery took one look at the wounds and swore that at the time they were made, life had been extinct at least an hour. Which

means that she was dead when thrown from that car. I guess that's all. Except, of course, that we haven't identified the girl yet and we don't know what caused her death. Doc Emery ought to report on that any minute now. Want to go down to the morgue?"

Ralph shook his head, and snapped out an order for me to get Slim Morris. Slim looked scared when I told him he was wanted in the Captain's office, but he said nothing. A fine lot of chaps, most of those boys are. They know a lot; but they're not running to the police with it!

"Slim," said Ralph, "last night at about ten o'clock you were called to the Trotter's Café. Remember?"

"Well," said Slim, shifting his feet, "that depends, Mr. Hardy."

"At the Trotter's you picked up Greaseball Mazetti and a girl. *That's the last time the girl was seen alive.* That help your memory?"

"Hell, yes!" exploded Slim. "Sure I remember them. I know Mazetti. I don't know the girl, but I'd recognize her in a minute. Pretty blonde with blue eyes. Had a swell pair o' Chinese jade pendants."

"You took them out to the Oriental Lodge?"

"No, no! I took them to the corner o' Park Avenue and Elm Street. That's what Mazetti told me. See? No number. Just that corner. When I left, they were walking down Elm Street toward Ellis."

"What time was that?"

"About ten-twenty, I'd say."

"But you saw them after that?"

"No, I didn't, Mr. Hardy!" declared Slim with obvious truth.

RALPH considered that a moment: then he rose. "Captain, that's about all I can do. This is a police case, and I'm not butting in. I got a tip that the girl had been seen with Mazetti, so I thought I'd run down and tell you. If the girl had been dead an hour when she was thrown from that car, then she certainly wasn't alive very long after Slim left her with Mazetti at the corner of Park and Elm. We'd better take Slim down and make sure there's no mistake about this being the same girl. Then while you're trying to locate Mazetti, Dean and I will follow another line and see if it gets us anything."

Captain Creave arose; but just as we started toward the door that opened on the stairs leading down to the morgue, some one came pounding up the stairs. The door was flung open, and into the Captain's office stepped the autopsy surgeon Doc Emery, and Detective Joe Dahlberry.

I remember how Doc Emery stopped short at the sight of Ralph Hardy standing by the Captain's desk. He glanced at me, then at Slim Morris.

"Busy, Captain?" the Doctor asked.

"Just going to take this fellow down to identify the girl. Why? What do you know?"

"Send him down with Joe. I don't know anything, but I want you and Mr. Hardy to stay here."

"Take him down, Joe," said Creave. "Slim, don't make any mistake, now!"

Detective Dahlberry and Slim left. I remember how Doc Emery stood for a moment looking at the door as if listening to the sound of their steps; then he turned slowly to look at Ralph.

"Captain," said Doc Emery, still looking at Ralph, "I didn't want to say anything before that man. But I'm glad Mr. Hardy is here." He stepped to Creave's desk and as he spoke, struck the desk repeatedly with his fist. "Gentlemen, this is the second case—the second fatal case—in six weeks. Two others were found in time—"

"What're you talking about?" Creave broke in impatiently. "What killed the girl?"

Doc Emery, still looking at Ralph, answered with slow emphasis:

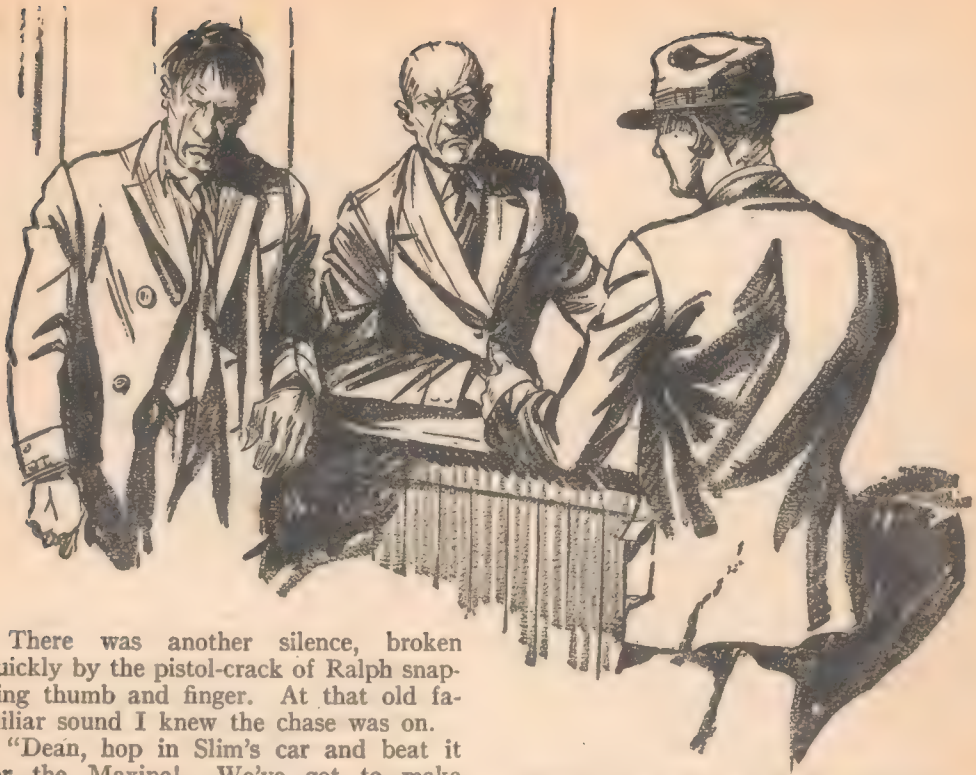
"Crystal cocaine."

There was a silence; then Ralph snapped: "Addict?"

Doc Emery shook his head—emphatically. "Not a sign of addiction, Mr. Hardy. The girl is a victim of those coke parties we've heard so much about lately. Young men with more money than sense; young women with more beauty than brains—all looking for a 'thrill,' something with a new 'kick.' It's terrible, I tell you. Something—"

AGAIN steps pounded on the stairs and the door was flung open. Slim Morris entered, followed by Dahlberry.

"It's her," said Slim. "The Chinese pendants are gone, but I know it's the girl I saw with Mazetti."



"Don't try to lie to me," Ralph was saying. "I know enough already to bust this town wide open!"

There was another silence, broken quickly by the pistol-crack of Ralph snapping thumb and finger. At that old familiar sound I knew the chase was on.

"Dean, hop in Slim's car and beat it for the Maxine! We've got to make Kitty talk now, and right here's the place to do it. Don't come back without her. You hear?" he demanded impatiently, reaching for the Captain's desk phone. "And listen! I don't want to phone Kitty. You ask her where Mazetti lives. She knows. Make her tell, and phone me. Snappy now!"

Slim and I made for the hall door. Behind me I heard Ralph give a number, and I knew then that within half an hour every man on our force would be on duty.

The streets were practically deserted at that hour and Slim and I were quickly back at the Maxine. Again the wooden-faced clerk eyed me with hostility.

"Miss Enright is out," he told me curtly.

"Out?" I echoed, astonished. "At this hour? How long ago did she leave?"

"That's her business." The clerk turned to the switchboard.

Both his tone and his manner were insulting; but I had long ago learned to overlook such things and go after what I wanted. I leaned over the counter.

"I'm making it my business just now. And, by the way, I believe I know you. Dorman—that's the name! I knew your face—and your record. You better not remind me of too much, Dorman."

He turned on me savagely. "Well, what do you want? Can't you see I'm busy?"

"I want a civil answer. How long ago did Miss Enright go out?"

"About ten minutes ago she got a phone call. She went right out. She told me that if any one called, I was to say she'd be back in fifteen or twenty minutes, or would telephone."

"And she hasn't phoned?"

DORMAN shook his head. "Sit down and wait, if you want to. I have no objections." I did some fast thinking; and the more I thought, the more suspicious I became. That phone call, coming for Kitty Enright just a few minutes after Ralph and I left, might mean nothing—and it might mean much. Recalling what Ralph had said about the clerk signaling to a man trying to hide his face behind a *Chronicle,* I resolved to take no chances.

"Get me Douglas 20," I told the clerk. "And when you get it, remember you're too busy to listen in. Understand?"

Dorman snorted, and plugged in a trunk line. I entered one of the booths and was soon talking with Ralph.

"Hop upstairs and take a look at her

room," Ralph ordered promptly. "I'll phone the exchange and see if they can trace back that call. Looks bad to me. Give me a ring here if I don't call you first."

I hung up and went back to the hotel office. When I told Dorman I wanted to go up to Miss Enright's room, he looked startled; then, without a word, he got his pass key and followed me.

What Ralph thought I might find in Kitty's room, I did not know. Anyway, I found nothing. The room, so far as I could see, was just as it was when Ralph and I left it.

When the clerk and I got back downstairs, I glanced at my watch. It was half-past five. The lobby was almost deserted. A foppish chap sat by the door watching me. He looked away quickly when he met my gaze. Two overrouged girls were in a corner conversing excitedly in whispers. Outside, Slim was walking up and down by his car.

I lighted a cigarette and sat down to wait. Ralph would phone soon. Perhaps he was on his way to join me. In the meantime, Kitty might return or phone.

TEN minutes passed; then the buzzer signaled. The clerk answered, and nodded to me. I stepped quickly to one of the booths. It was Captain Creave calling. He wanted me to send Slim Morris back to detective headquarters. They were going to have Slim help them locate Mazetti.

I hastened out to give Slim orders to hurry back to the station. He stared at me a moment; then, without a word, he hopped into his car and was off.

By that time I had decided to question Dorman further. Evidently he had concluded that he had made a wrong start with me, for he apologized for his incivility and said he would tell me anything he knew.

"That's better," I told him. "Supposing we begin with that telephone call that Miss Enright got shortly after Mr. Hardy and I left. Was that call from a man or from a woman?"

"It was from a woman. She said she was phoning—" Dorman hesitated, and looked embarrassed.

"Go on!" I urged him. "I know you listened in. What did the woman say?"

"Well, she said she was phoning for one of the hat-check girls at the Trotter's. She said the girl had been badly hurt in an auto smash and was at a hospital calling for Miss Enright."

"What hospital?"

"I didn't get the name. No, I'm telling you the truth! Miss Enright didn't ask the name of the hospital, either. The woman on the wire said she was sending a car for her. Miss Enright did ask the name of the girl who was hurt, and the woman said she'd find out. A minute later she said the girl had become unconscious, and would Miss Enright please hurry, that the car had left to get her. That's all."

"Did you see the girl?"

"No. When Miss Enright went out she looked up and down the street, then hurried toward Mason."

I RECALLED then that Ralph had said he would try to trace the call that had taken Kitty away. Undoubtedly he had done so, and had hastened out to the hospital to get the girl. He would take Kitty to Creave's office, then phone me.

Again I sat down to wait. Perhaps twenty minutes passed; then there was a call for me. I hurried to the booth, sure that it was Ralph.

"Hey, Dean," said the voice of Captain Creave, "didn't you tell Slim Morris to beat it down here?"

"I sure did, Captain! Hasn't he showed up yet?"

"Sure he understood that you meant my office—not the Limousine office?"

"I didn't mention any office, Captain. I told him plainly that you—Captain Creave—wanted to see him at detective headquarters at once."

"A-ha! I thought all the time that bird knew more than he was telling! Dean, we've let something big slip through our fingers. When Slim didn't show up here, I phoned the taxi office. Sure enough, he had been there, had checked out, and beat it. I just missed him. Got a couple men on the run up there, but it's probably too late. You better get around there quick. Limousine Service is two blocks from the Maxine. Slip in there quietly and try to get Slim's home address from their books. By that time my men will be there—"

"But, Captain," I objected, "Ralph may be here any minute. Or Kitty Enright. I don't think—"

"I don't think you'd better make any

more fumbles!" Creave broke in hotly. "You and Hardy played hell letting Slim get away. Now bust over there and do something! Will you, or will you not?"

"I will!" I answered quickly, and hung up. I knew from experience just what Ralph would have had me do. Slim's running away meant that he knew something. If I caught him I'd have to hurry.

I stepped out of the phone booth—and there stopped short. By the desk, talking in a low voice to Dorman, stood Ralph Hardy. Beside him, his clothes badly rumpled, was Slim Morris.

"Don't try to lie to me, Dorman," Ralph was saying. "That call didn't come from a hospital; it came from a booth in the Halliday Hotel—where your friend Mazetti lives. When Miss Enright stepped into that gray sedan she was in Mazetti's hands. They'll murder her, if necessary, to keep her from telling what she knows. But she doesn't need to tell anything. I know enough already that I'm going to bust this town wide open within the next forty-eight hours. You hear?"

CHAPTER III

CAPTAIN CREAVE stared in astonishment when Ralph, Slim and I strode into his office; but the Captain was not the only one who got a surprise. Back of the door, apparently waiting for Ralph, was Inspector Mo Erlman.

Huddled on a chair, steel bracelets on his slim, white wrists, was the man I had seen watching me at the Maxine—the foppish chap.

"Erlman!" snapped Ralph; "what are you doing here? Have that man locked up at once. Book him *'en route to Marshal's office.'* That will do until the Captain has a murder charge prepared."

At that, the man in handcuffs shot to his feet. "But, Mr. Hardy, I—"

"Not a word out of you! Anything you told would be a lie! Take him out!"

I opened the door and the prisoner was rushed out of the room.

"Captain," said Ralph, when we were seated around his desk, "you were out for a cup of coffee when Dean phoned that Kitty Enright had been called away. I traced the call and found that it came from the Halliday Hotel. You know that joint: high-class hotel for high-class crooks.

"I decide to beat it up there at once. Remembering that Inspectors Ellsman and Erlman live in a hotel I'd pass on the way, I phone them to meet me downstairs. I pick them up and the three of us go on to the Halliday.

"Remember now what I told you about Kitty Enright giving us the tip that the girl found on the Great Highway had been seen with Mazetti. First I learn at the Halliday that at about four-thirty—which would be just after Dean and I left Kitty's room—a gray sedan stopped in front of the hotel. A swell-dressed woman with black hair and dark eyes and wearing a flock o' jewelry, entered the hotel and used one of the private phone booths in the lobby. The clerk at the Halliday said he was sure he had never seen the woman before, but he was certain that the gray sedan had come there often with a Halliday guest who was registered as *H. Moreno.* It took me about two minutes to find out that *H. Moreno* is our friend Horatio Mazetti. See?"

Captain Creave nodded. "I'm following you!" he said eagerly. "Mazetti has made away with the Enright girl to keep her from talking. Why didn't you bring Mazetti in with you?"

"He wasn't there; so I left Chick Ellsman to pick up Mazetti, and I beat it with Inspector Erlman to the Maxine where I had sent Dean. Our car stopped across the street from the Maxine just as I saw Dean go into the phone booth. Then, Dean," Ralph went on, turning to me, "that bird sitting in the lobby slips out quick to Slim's car, talks with him a minute, then hands him something and hikes off down the street. I send Erlman after him, and I decide to watch Slim. I see you come out and tell him something. When he drives off, I follow. He goes to the Limousine Service, checks in in a hurry, then walks a block back toward the Maxine to where he rooms. As he starts up the stairs, I hop out of my cab and go after him. We muss up the stairs a bit, then I search Slim and find this."

RALPH took an envelope from his pocket. Out of the envelope on to Creave's desk, he shook five one-hundred-dollar bills.

"Five centuries!" exclaimed Creave. "Paying him to skip, eh?" The Captain glared up at Slim Morris. "What's the big idea? Go on and spill it, Morris!"

I saw Slim meet the Captain's gaze.

unafraid, defiant. Then a crafty look came over his face. "I don't know a damn' thing about this," he said surlily; "and if I did, I wouldn't tell."

"Dean," Ralph spoke up quickly, "take Slim down and book him for interfering with a government officer. Turn this money in with Slim's other stuff. It's his so far as we know. Hurry back."

I took the money and led Slim out. At the door to the booking office I stopped and spoke to Slim as if on sudden impulse. "See here, Slim; what's the use of you going through all this trouble to protect some one who'll probably turn on you at the first chance? Let's go back and tell Hardy the whole thing."

"You go to hell," said Slim, grinning.

"All right," I said, realizing that argument would be useless. I booked him and hastened back to Creave's office. I told Ralph what Slim had said.

"I don't believe you'll ever get a word out of him," I said; "and Dorman is sure to warn the gang that—"

"Just what I figured, Dean," Ralph broke in quietly. "I gave Dorman a scare to stir the rats out of their holes. Erlman will take care of him. Sent Mo there the minute he came back up from booking Flores. Also, through Dorman, I sent word to Mazetti that he has nothing to gain by harming Kitty Enright. That isn't true, but I hope Mazetti believes it. Captain, if we don't hear from Ellsman pretty soon maybe you'd better send a man up there. I want to wait here. Flores will talk. I would have listened to him at first, but I had to get rid of Slim. Besides, I figured that Flores would be more inclined to tell the truth after he has heard a cell door clang shut behind him."

"I bet Slim could tell more," said Captain Creave. "We ought to make that bird talk."

"Maybe," admitted Ralph; "but I have a hunch he is telling the truth. I think he is as much up in the air over that five hundred bucks as we are. I believe he figures that for the present the safest place for Slim Morris is in jail. So I'm counting on Flores. He'll send for me pretty soon; then—"

THERE was an interruption as Detective Dahlberry opened the visitor's door and stepped in. He closed the door carefully before speaking.

"Out there," said Dahlberry, nodding toward the reception-room, "is a sour-faced dame with a vinegar voice and a stiff black dress that makes you think of a funeral. She says she's been waiting up all night for her niece and has just read about the girl killed on the beach highway."

"Bring her in!" snapped Creave eagerly. "Hardy, we're going to know something in a minute! I hope to find out who the girl was with between ten-thirty and the time she died."

"Yes," said Ralph quietly, that far-away look in his eyes. "But, after all, she's only one. So I hope we find out *where she went* after Slim left her and Mazetti at the corner of Park and Elm."

As the woman stepped defiantly into Creave's office, I remember thinking that if she was the girl's aunt, then I was sorry for the girl. You could take one look at that woman and know that her home would be about as cheerful as a cross between a railroad tragedy and a pest-house. A good woman, of course; but the type that's too confounded good to be wholesome.

"Sit down, madam," said Captain Creave. "These men are Federal officers. They're working with me on this case. You think you know the girl who was killed on the beach highway? What is your name, please?"

The woman sat down on the edge of her chair. With one contemptuous glance she dismissed Ralph and me, and turned to Captain Creave.

"I am Miss Cynthia Eliza Armond," she said in a rasping voice. "But I didn't come here to be questioned; I came to see the—the dead girl."

"Exactly. You think the girl may be your niece? What is her name?"

"Elise Armond. She lives—has lived with me at Twelve-sixty-five Elm—near the corner of Park."

I saw Creave and Ralph exchange glances. "Describe your niece, please," said Creave.

The woman hesitated. "Well, the paper said the girl was pretty. Elise always thought she was, but I couldn't see it. She has very light hair, blue eyes, and never was very strong. I was always opposed to her running around nights."

"What jewelry did she wear?"

"I don't know what rings Elise wore tonight; but she never went out without her jade pendants. However, if you are

"You sure look like you need a shot!" exclaimed Creave. "Well, you're not going to get it yet."

not going to permit me to see the girl, I have nothing more to say."

Again Captain Creave looked at Ralph. I could see that he was certain that the girl was Elise Armond. And I knew why he delayed taking the aunt down to the morgue. She would tell more now than she could remember after that shock.

"Tell me, Miss Armond, please," Ralph spoke up; "what time did your niece leave home last night?"

Miss Armond eyed Ralph coldly. "She left at about seven-thirty. I don't know where she went. Nor with whom. I am not in her confidence."

"And you have not seen her since?"

Miss Armond shook her head.

"You are absolutely certain that she wasn't home—perhaps only for a few minutes—shortly after ten o'clock?"

"Absolutely! She couldn't get in the house without my knowing it."

"Is there any place—a friend's house, perhaps—where your niece was in the habit of going—I mean a place near the corner of Park and Elm?"

Miss Armond thought for a moment. "Well, Elise never told me anything, as I say; but I felt it my duty as her legal guardian to take an interest in her affairs. So I have overheard several telephone calls. Lately, she has been ringing a girl she calls *Nita*. I feel certain the girl lives near my home and that Elise has been spending much of her time there. I don't know where the place is, and I don't know the girl's last name; but the phone number is *Park 80-W*."

I jotted that down. Ralph went on: "Miss Armond, do you know a man named Mazetti, or Moreno?"

"I know none of Elise's acquaintances!" snapped Miss Armond. "And I don't—"

Again the visitor's door opened and Detective Dahlberry entered. He stepped apologetically to where Ralph sat. I heard him whisper: "That guy Flores is sobbin' all over his cell. Asked me to *beg* you to let him see you."

Ralph looked at Captain Creave. He, too, had heard Dahlberry's whisper. "Go get him, Joe," Creave said. "I'll take Miss Armond downstairs."

They left. I took that chance to call the telephone office. In a moment I was informed that the phone at *Park 80-W* was in the name of Nita O'Neill, Apartment 55, Number 1347 Elm Street.

"Nita O'Neill," Ralph repeated slowly. "We never got a rap on her, did we?"

"Never heard of Nita before, and no report ever came in against that address," I replied. "But that wouldn't be far from Park and Elm where Miss Armond lived."

"We'll run out there as soon as we talk with Flores. Maybe just a girl friend; and it may be the place where Elise Armond died from cocaine poisoning. We

can't overlook anything in this case, Dean. I wish Chick Ellsman would phone in. Queer that Mazetti doesn't show up at his hotel. Still, I suppose it isn't queer, either, after what happened. I wish we'd taken better care of Kitty, but we—"

CAPTAIN CREAVE came pounding up the stairs and into the room. "It's her," he said. "Elise Armond. And all I can get out of Miss Cynthia Eliza Armond now is that for fifteen years she's been telling that girl she would come to a bad end. Huh! No wonder!" Creave grunted in disgust. "I knew you didn't want to see her again, so I slipped her out the alley exit where her car was waiting. I guess this is Joe, with Flores."

The hall door opened, and Joe Dahlberry led the man to a chair by Creave's desk. Flores seemed on the verge of a collapse. When Dahlberry let go of him, he dropped in a heap into the chair. And as I looked at the man's twitching, white face and saw the agony in his eyes, I understood.

"You sure look like you need a shot!" exclaimed Creave. "Well, you're not going to get it—yet. If you need a doctor when Mr. Hardy gets through with you, maybe I can find one. Take your prisoner, Hardy!"

Ralph slipped a folded paper from his inside coat-pocket, studied it a moment, then handed it to me. "These are the known facts," he whispered, so Flores could not help hearing. "Don't interrupt; but make a note of how his story tallies with this."

I looked down at the paper, and frowned. Then, suddenly, I understood. This was all bluff to trick Flores into telling a straight story. The paper Ralph had given me was nothing but a typed copy of a recent Treasury Decision on the exportation of narcotics. I got out a pencil and held the paper beneath the desk where Flores could not see it.

"You understand that the statement you are about to make is given of your own free will and without any coercion and what you say may be used against you?" Ralph rolled off the old formula solemnly.

"I do," gulped Flores.

"Give him the oath, Inspector Dean!"

I raised my right hand. Flores did likewise. I looked Flores in the eyes and spoke slowly and clearly: "You do solemnly swear that you will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me—"

Flores leaped to his feet. "Of course I'll tell the truth!" he cried hysterically. "I want you to know the truth! It wasn't murder! And I didn't have anything to—"

"Set down, set down," ordered Dahlberry calmly, shoving Flores back into his chair.

Flores subsided. His slim, white hands working nervously, his eyes burning, he looked at Ralph.

"What is your name?" Ralph began.

"George Caro Flores."

"What nationality is that?"

Flores hesitated a second, then spoke with a touch of defiance: "South American."

"We'll let it go at that," Ralph told him. "Where do you reside?"

"At the Halliday Hotel."

"How long have you known Horatio Mazetti?"

"I've known the man all my life. He is my cousin. His real name is the name he is using now—Hermanos Moreno."

"Then Mazetti—or Moreno—is not Italian? He, too, is—South American?"

"Yes. We're all one family."

"The dark-haired woman who came to the Halliday in a gray sedan about four-thirty this morning and phoned to Kitty Enright—she belongs to the—family, as you say?"

"She's the head of the whole ring! But you'll never get her! You get too close to her trail and it'll be curtains for you. Don't you forget that! Besides, this was all an accident—"

"What's the lady's name?" Ralph interrupted quietly.

Flores stared at Ralph an instant, then turned slowly to me. "If you've got it written down there, I don't need to tell you," he sneered.

I LOOKED at Ralph. His eyes were flashing me a message—but what? I glanced up at Creave. He, too,—and Dahlberry,—were watching me. I knew I had to make the plunge.

"The name here," I began, then bent my head as if to see better. "The name here," I went on, "is—*Nita O'Neill.*"

"That's a lie!" shrieked Flores, again leaping to his feet. I saw Ralph signal Dahlberry to leave him alone. "That's a lie!" Flores repeated hysterically. "Nita

never had a thing to do with this! I tell you it was all an accident. The Armond girl started coming to our snow parties about a month ago. She was as wild as any of them, but everybody liked her. Yesterday she started in early in the afternoon. We got worried, but we couldn't do anything with her. She said she had had trouble with her aunt and didn't care what happened. Finally we got Moreno —the man you call Mazetti—to take her away. He tried to get her to eat, but he couldn't do anything with her any more than we had. About half past ten she came back—alone. We had the radio going then and most of us were dancing. Elise Armond watched a few minutes, then went toward the kitchen. Next thing, I knew everyone was saying that Elise was dying, and in ten minutes the place was cleared.

"We did everything we could, but our doctor soon told us there was no hope and that we had better get rid of her. So we stripped off her jewelry to make it look like robbery. Then we took her out the back way to our car. We intended to leave her in Golden Gate Park, but some car got close behind us and hung on. Finally we got scared, thinking that car was following us. We speeded up, crossed to the Great Highway, and at a spot where we felt we wouldn't be seen, threw her out.

"Then we got hold of Moreno and told him what had happened. He was scared. He said an old enemy of his, Kitty Enright, had seen him with the Armond girl in the Trotter's. When the papers came out, we were all scared; but we didn't see how we would ever be connected with the affair except through Kitty Enright. Moreno said he knew the night clerk at the Maxine, and he got busy at once. Kitty Enright got to her room about half past two and immediately put in a call for you. At four we got a tip that you were on your way to see her. A little later we learned that you had phoned for Slim Morris.

"How much Slim Morris knew and what he had seen, we couldn't guess, but right away we got the idea that he was the one who had followed us through the park. So Moreno gave me five hundred dollars, told me to find Morris and have him skip town. I called the Limousine Service and found that Slim had just rung in from the police station. I beat it down here just in time to see him leaving. I followed him back to the Maxine and we talked it over. He balked at first, but finally said he would take the money and if he didn't leave town within an hour he would give it back. I gave him the five hundred dollars and started back to the Halliday. Before I had gone two blocks I was arrested. And—and that's all."

Flores finished and collapsed back in his chair, gasping, his whole body trembling violently, his face and slim, white hands jerking spasmodically.

THERE was a silence. I remember thinking that this broken wretch had obviously told the truth; but he had cleverly evaded mentioning a single name or address.

Then, with startling suddenness, Ralph sprang to his feet. He caught Flores by the shoulders.

"But that isn't all!" Ralph snarled in Flores' face. "Who is Nita O'Neill? Where are these snow parties held? Where is Kitty Enright? You know; and you're going to tell right now. It's your only chance to save yourself!"

For a moment Flores was unable to speak. Over his face came a look of abject despair, then of terror; and I knew that Ralph had broken down the man's last vestige of defiance.

"They—they'll kill me," whimpered Flores. "You'll tell them I squawked."

"I'll tell them nothing! We know enough right now to land the whole gang, including you. Are you going to prison with them? If anything happens to Kitty Enright it'll be curtains for you. You better talk, and talk fast."

"Kitty Enright?" echoed Flores, and sat up slowly. "I wonder—say, what do you want to know? I'll take you on your word to look out for me. But—you'd better hurry!"

"I want to know where they've taken Kitty Enright! Who's Nita O'Neill, and where is she? Where are these snow parties held? Where do they get their cocaine? And where is Mazetti?"

Flores leaned forward, one trembling hand gripping the edge of Creave's desk. I remember Creave got noisily to his feet. I, too, arose. As if afraid we would miss a word, we crowded close to the prisoner.

There was a tense instant of silence—broken by a sound that made every man

of us turn quickly. It was the squeak of the visitor's door. Into the room, unconcerned, smiling as ever, stepped the man we knew as Greaseball Mazetti.

CHAPTER IV

I CAN see Mazetti now as he looked that morning he astounded us by walking into detective headquarters. He wore a dark gray suit of good material, expensively tailored but a trifle flashy. A gray hat sat jauntily on his head. In one hand he carried gloves and a cane; in the other was a tightly rolled newspaper. A slender man, dark, nervous, he was at that moment the coolest person in Creave's office.

"Well, well!" Mazetti exclaimed, his swarthy face lighted by a flashing smile. He closed the door; in his brisk swagger he stepped quickly to Creave's desk. "This is a pleasant surprise! Greetings, Hardy. And Dean! Hello, Joe! Captain, I hope I am not intruding!"

It struck me as significant that Mazetti appeared not to notice Flores, and I turned to look at our prisoner. The change that had come over the man was startling. He was shrinking back in his chair, his face tense, a hard glitter in his narrowed eyes.

Then Captain Creave found his voice.

"Joe, go out there where you belong. Don't let anyone else walk in unannounced. Sit down, Mazetti! How long have you been at that door listening? What brought you down here? We were just talking about you."

"About me!" Mazetti shot a searching look at Ralph and drew up a chair. He took off his hat and passed a hand over his slick, oily hair—the hair that had fastened on him the sobriquet of "Greaseball." "Why, you honor me, Captain! What possible interest can you have in me? Did you"—Mazetti turned then for the first time to look at Flores—"did you find my money that snowbird stole? I was coming down in the morning to swear out a warrant for him; but"—he held up the newspaper—"I just read about that girl who was killed on the Great Highway, and I hurried right down here. Have you identified her yet?"

"One thing at a time, Mazetti!" Creave broke in. "What's this about Flores stealing five hundred dollars from you?"

MAZETTI hesitated, then burst into rapid speech as if suddenly determined to go through with a painful duty.

"Captain, I don't like to do this, but I have lost all patience. That man is my cousin. For years I have supported him. I'm tired of it. He has disgraced me by the way he uses cocaine. I told him the other day I was through. Last night he came to me all upset. Said he was in serious trouble and had to have five hundred dollars. I refused. Then he said if I didn't help him, he would make it hot for me, that he could tell the police something that would land me in prison. I laughed at him. I made a mistake once—Hardy knows all about that—but I've kept in the clear since. Then—"

"What time was it when Flores made that threat?" Creave asked.

"It was shortly after two. I had not seen the morning paper, did not see it until just a few minutes ago; but I believe now that Flores knew I was acquainted with Miss Armond and suspected, or knew, that the girl killed on the Great Highway was Miss Armond. Is that right, Captain? Was it—"

Creave nodded.

"I'm sorry," Mazetti said quietly, his head bowed. "And if I can tell you anything that will help—"

There was a rap on the visitor's door, then Detective Dahlberry stepped in, handed Ralph a note, and went out again. Ralph glanced over the note indifferently, and passed it to me. I read:

> Mazetti came back in gray sedan driven by richly dressed woman with black hair and dark eyes. I got license number and am going downstairs to traffic bureau to get owner's name. When woman waited while Mazetti went into hotel I thought I'd wait and grab both, but in about twenty minutes Mazetti slipped out side door and grabbed taxi. I let woman go and tailed Mazetti. Sure got surprise when he led me here. Any orders?
>
> CHICK ELLSMAN.

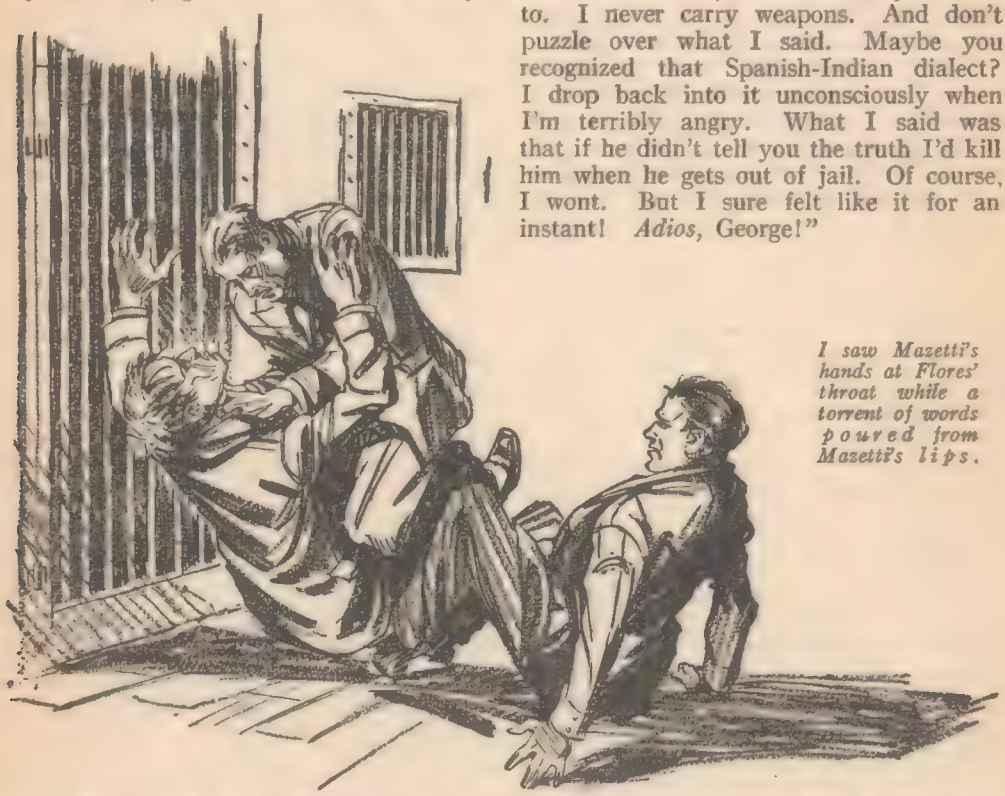
I folded the note and put it in my pocket. As I looked up, Mazetti said: "Gentlemen, if that is a message from the man who followed me here, invite him in. I have nothing to conceal."

I am afraid that my astonishment betrayed to Mazetti that he had guessed right; but Ralph's expression never changed.

"See here!" Creave spoke up impatiently. "Some one is lying like hell! Flores says you gave him five hundred

dollars and told him to give it to Slim Morris to skip out of town. And you—"

"That I gave it to him!" cried Mazetti, jumping to his feet. "And you believed that snowbird! Listen, Captain! When I refused to give him the money he forged my name to an order on the clerk at the Halliday. The clerk, knowing that I had several times given Flores an order on my account, gave Flores the money.



I saw Mazetti's hands at Flores' throat while a torrent of words poured from Mazetti's lips.

Phone the Halliday and ask him if I'm lying—or phone Dorman and ask him about Flores and Kitty Enright! Those two have been playing a slick game!"

"Flores," said Creave sharply, "you heard that! What about it?"

"It's true!" Flores cried. "I did—just what he says I did!"

"Better send him down, Captain," Ralph remarked quietly. "Dean can take him, if you wish."

Creave nodded. I arose and took Flores by the arm. He cast one look at Mazetti, then shrank close to me as I started him toward the hall door.

JUST what happened then, I could not clearly see. Simultaneously with a warning shout from Ralph, a gray-clad figure hurtled through the air, struck Flores and flung both of us against the wall. I saw Mazetti's hands at Flores' throat, saw Flores pull them away while a torrent of words I could not understand poured from Mazetti's lips.

Then Ralph had Mazetti by the collar —and it was all over. Mazetti laughed.

"Sorry I lost my temper, Captain; but that man— Yes, search me if you want to. I never carry weapons. And don't puzzle over what I said. Maybe you recognized that Spanish-Indian dialect? I drop back into it unconsciously when I'm terribly angry. What I said was that if he didn't tell you the truth I'd kill him when he gets out of jail. Of course, I wont. But I sure felt like it for an instant! *Adios,* George!"

Flores said nothing, but there was a queer glitter in his eyes as he watched Mazetti. When I opened the door, he slipped out quickly. In the hall, I met Dahlberry and turned Flores over to him. Anxious to hear the rest of Mazetti's story, I hurried back to Creave's office.

But Ralph—to my utter amazement—was stepping toward Mazetti, a smile on his face, his hand outstretched.

"Don't let him frame you, Greaseball!" Ralph said. "If he does, and you need help, call me. I like the way you came clean in this case. Bye!"

Much puzzled and disappointed, I followed Ralph out to the reception-room. Chick Ellsman was there, but Dahlberry had not returned from taking Flores to his cell. Beckoning to Inspector Ellsman,

Ralph hastened out the hall door. And not a word did we get out of him until he was at the desk in his office.

I remember looking up at the big wall clock and noting that it was only half past seven. The room was dark, the air rank with the odor of desk polish. I raised the shades and opened the windows. Below, the wholesale district was athrob with its usual morning activity; beyond, across the bay, the sun was rising above the fog that capped the Berkeley hills.

"Boys," said Ralph, "we're up against one of the cleverest crooks we've ever met. Mazetti—or Moreno—isn't half as good a liar as he thinks he is, but he's good enough at that. He had his story all carefully planned and rehearsed. And he came to Creave's office ready to tell us only what he thought we already knew, but prepared to alibi himself against anything we might have uncovered against him. His real purpose, of course, was to find out just how much we actually do know, and to see what had happened to Flores. He didn't fool me; and I'm afraid I didn't deceive him."

"How did Mazetti know that we knew anything?" demanded Chick.

Ralph told him briefly what we had learned from Flores, about the death of Elise Armond, their trip through the park to the beach, and how Dorman had kept them posted as to Kitty Enright's telephone calls and our visit. "When Kitty Enright left the Maxine and walked toward Mason Street she probably stepped into that same gray sedan that brought Mazetti to the Halliday," Ralph said. "Glad you caught the license number, Chick! Did you find the owner's name?"

"I did," said Chick; "but you'll say I made a mistake. The registered owner of that gray sedan is Denver Rincon."

"Denver Rincon! The president of the Rincon Exporting Company?"

"Exactly. We've checked their records many times. Always found everything straight. They export various merchandise, mostly medicines and hospital supplies to South American countries. They never keep any narcotics on hand. Carry just an export license. Buy their narcotics from registered wholesalers and ship everything through to South America. Absolutely impossible for any crooked work to be going on there. Do you want me to see Rincon and find out who used his car last night?"

Ralph nodded, that far-away look in his eyes again.

"Do that, Chick," he said finally; "but don't rap to Rincon. Maybe—maybe you'd better wait. There's something—about this—something big—that keeps just out of my reach. I have the feeling that—that somewhere I've made a slip—that something terrible is going to happen that I should have prevented. I hope it isn't Kitty Enright. I think Denver Rincon, himself, is in the clear; but if we question him it is bound to get back to Mazetti. I wish Creave could charge him with murder and hold him without bail; but he can't do that—yet. And if he arrests Mazetti on any other charge, he'll be out on bonds in no time.

"We could trail him, search his room—all the old stuff—but something tells me that Mazetti expects just that and is ready for it. Also I have the feeling that Kitty Enright is safe until we get to crowding Mazetti too hard. Queer how I keep thinking of that girl!

"Maybe it's Mo Erlman who's in danger! Dean, you better get Harry Larsen on the phone. I told him to call his working partner and wait in his room for orders. Tell him to go to the Maxine and relieve Erlman. Tell him to keep Hartwick with him. Hear?"

I NODDED, and reached for the phone. Ralph went on: "Chick, when Erlman comes in, you and he better work the police end. Keep in touch with Creave. . . . . Dean and I will call on Nita O'Neill right away. Then we'll try Flores again. Get a cab, Dean."

I called a taxi and in ten minutes we were on our way. Ralph was strangely silent. As we turned out Bush Street he changed the order, telling the driver to run over to Ralph's hotel. While Ralph ran up to his room to change his clothes, I took that chance to get a cup of coffee.

I remember I was standing by our taxi, smoking a cigarette, when I saw the door of Ralph's hotel flung violently open. Out dashed Ralph, pulling on his coat as he ran. "Get going!" he shouted, and I jumped in. The driver started the motor. "Police station!" Ralph ordered as he sprang in. "Hurry, hurry!"

I wondered what was up, but knew better than to ask. Before the taxi had come to a stop, we were out and dashing up the steps of the main entrance. I

supposed we were headed for Creave's office, but Ralph went by detective headquarters without even a glance at the door. Downstairs a uniformed officer called out to the turnkey and the big door to the cells swung open.

A glance down that corridor showed me three men: Captain Creave, Detective Dahlberry, and the autopsy surgeon, Doc Emery. They were standing in front of the cell where we had put Flores. And the cell door was open.

"He's dead," said Captain Creave. "Stone dead!"

RALPH and I crowded into the cell. George Caro Flores lay on his back on the bunk, just as if he had lain down and fallen asleep. There was a look of peace on his face; his slim, white hands were folded across his breast.

"Crystal cocaine," said Doc Emery. "Damned stuff!"

"There's going to be hell to pay for this," Creave spoke up. "Hardy, the minute you phoned for us to search that man again, I grabbed Joe and we beat it right down here. He was dead then. Joe, this looks bad—"

"Captain, I swear that man was clean when Erlman booked him!" Dahlberry declared heatedly. "I was there and helped frisk him. And I've frisked too many for any dope to get by. I went through his hair, his ears, his mouth, the seams of his clothes—every place dopes hide their stuff; and—"

"It's not Joe's fault," Ralph spoke up. "The stuff was passed in your office, Captain. Right before our eyes, and we didn't see it. Remember when Mazetti jumped on Flores? That's when the trick was done."

"The devil you say!" exploded Creave. "So that was all a blind to cover the passing of the dope! I wish I had known that before I turned Mazetti loose!"

"I should have guessed it sooner," said Ralph; "but I slipped up there. Mazetti, you see, knew that if we had Flores here we could make him talk by depriving him of his drug. So he brings Flores a supply. Flores, a fatalist like all addicts, and afraid for his life, anyway, decides to take it all at once and be done with it, just as Mazetti probably figured he would do. It was a fiendishly clever scheme."

"It was murder," declared Captain Creave; "but how am I going to fasten it on Mazetti? Anyway, he put Flores out of his misery."

"And sealed his lips," added Ralph. "Come on, Dean!"

CHAPTER V

WITH Flores gone, it seemed to me vitally important now to make no mistake with Nita O'Neill. We knew that Elise Armond had been in the habit of phoning her. The girl's aunt had said she believed Elise spent many afternoons and evenings there. Flores had led me to believe that Nita O'Neill was the black-haired woman driving the gray sedan, the woman he said was the head of the cocaine ring.

The landlady at the apartment house on Elm Street became all excited when Ralph stated our business. Never before had an officer questioned her regarding a guest!

"Don't misunderstand me," said Ralph quietly. "I am not accusing Miss O'Neill. It merely happens that she is a friend of the Armond girl who was—was killed on the Great Highway last night. How long has Miss Nita O'Neill had an apartment here?"

"Why, for almost three years," the landlady replied. "And never have I had a quieter guest, especially since she quit work about five months ago and moved into Number 55. I think the girl isn't well. She rises late, goes for a drive every day at about ten-thirty, but is always back in her apartment by twelve and doesn't leave it again until the next day."

"Did Elise Armond visit Miss O'Neill last night after ten o'clock?"

"No, sir! Nor did anybody else! For one thing, we lock our door at ten o'clock every night. After that, no one can get in without a night key, unless a guest comes down to open the door. Miss O'Neill has never done that. Besides, she doesn't have visitors once a month. She's a queer girl in a way. She always goes out alone—drives a black coupe—and comes back alone."

"Of course, you don't know if Elise Armond phoned her yesterday?"

THE landlady shook her head. "Each apartment has a private phone. Miss O'Neill's number is Park 80-W."

"We may hear of some one having been

seen with Miss Armond last night. Would you mind describing Miss O'Neill for me?"

"Well, she's a girl you'd stop to look at twice," the landlady replied, smiling. "She has bright red hair and a complexion as white as chalk. I think she makes up too much and dresses a bit flashy; but that's her business."

"It's certainly none of mine," Ralph said, and arose. "Well, it's clear that Miss O'Neill can't help us any on the Armond case. We need not bother her. And I wouldn't mention our visit, if I were you. No use offending a desirable guest."

"That's right," said the landlady, as if suddenly realizing that she had talked too freely; "I certainly wont mention it!"

We took our leave. "Well, Ralph," I said, as we struck off down Elm Street —we had dismissed our taxi—"you certainly drew a blank there!"

"On the contrary," Ralph retorted quietly, "I found out exactly what I wanted to know. Can't you ever learn to see beyond the perfectly obvious? Never mind, old boy!" he went on hurriedly; "I couldn't get along without you. Right now I need you to tell me what in thunder the word *'Quetzal'* means."

"The quetzal is a South American bird," I answered peevishly. "Why do you—"

Ralph started; then I heard that old familiar pistol-crack of thumb and finger. Down the street he went, so fast I had all I could do to keep pace with him. As we drew near a drug-store he told me to wait while he used the phone.

I waited, impatient and mystified; and presently I became aware that I was standing at the corner of Park and Elm. It was here that Slim Morris had left Mazetti and Elise Armond. They had walked on down Elm. Number 1265 would be about in the middle of the block. We had passed the house on our way from Number 1347, where Nita O'Neill lived.

WHERE had Elise and Mazetti gone? Certainly not to her own home. Evidently not to the apartment of Nita O'Neill. Flores had said that the Armond girl came back about half past ten, alone. That meant that within ten or fifteen minutes after Mazetti and Elise Armond started down Elm street, she was in the house where later she died. But where was it? And what did that word *Quetzal* have to do with the case?

I was half angry when Ralph emerged from the drug-store, but I said nothing when he ordered me curtly to follow him. A moment later we were on a street-car jogging back to town. When we alighted at a corner within a block of the Maxine, I saw Winifred waiting for us. A little farther on was Detective Dahlberry.

Winifred Worth was on the rolls as a stenographer, but she did work as a secret operative—and good work. Ralph signaled to Dahlberry and the four of us stepped inside a stairway.

"We're going to search Kitty Enright's room," Ralph explained. "Joe, after you went out of Creave's office, Mazetti told us that Flores and Kitty Enright were in partnership on some crooked business. You heard Flores admit that he was there when the Armond girl died. Well, Mazetti as much as said that Kitty Enright was there also. Miss Worth will take charge of the searching—girl's room, you know; but I told Captain Creave to send you up to take charge of any evidence we find. Dean, you and Joe go on ahead. If you see Inspector Larsen or Hartwick, don't rap. And take your time! I want to explain a few things to Win."

Joe and I went on slowly. I was astonished. It had never occurred to me that Ralph would take any stock in Mazetti's charges. By the time we reached the Maxine I was convinced that he was making the search just to be sure he overlooked nothing, that he did not expect to find anything that would incriminate Kitty Enright.

I was surprised to find Dorman still on duty, and he seemed equally surprised to see me back so soon. I told him what we wanted. He stared at me an instant; then with the curt explanation that he couldn't leave the switchboard, he handed me the pass key.

Detective Dahlberry and I had waited in Kitty's room almost ten minutes before Ralph and Win showed up. Ralph locked the door and then, under Win's direction, the search began. My job was to look for phone numbers written on the wall by the telephone, or marked in the directory. Ralph was to take the waste-basket. Win was to search the bureau drawers and closets. Detective Dahlberry was to stand by and be a witness in case any of us found anything—this, of course, to prevent any charge of "planting evidence."

One of the men tried to bite Ralph's hand. Ralph struck him between the eyes, and he went down.

THE whole thing struck me as a foolish waste of time; and when I had finished my job without finding any numbers worth investigating, I was satisfied to stand back and watch Winifred. Thus it happened that I was looking at her when she suddenly uttered a cry and pointed to something in the bottom bureau drawer.

Ralph and I got quickly to Win's side. Rolled in a ball, and jammed down in one corner of the drawer, was a blood-stained handkerchief.

Detective Dahlberry reached quickly for the handkerchief and unrolled it. Onto the bureau fell a pair of jade pendants.

For an instant no one spoke. Then Dahlberry jabbed a finger at one corner of the handkerchief. "Look, Hardy!" he exclaimed. "The initials—'E. A.' Elise Armond! By thunder, Mazetti was telling the truth!"

Ralph nodded. "Any use of searching further, Win?"

Winifred shook her head. "We've covered all the places a guilty woman would be careless enough to hide any evidence."

"It's enough, anyway!" spoke up Dahlberry. "I'm going to bust right down and show this to Captain Creave."

"Do that, Joe," said Ralph. "Tell him that so far as the government is concerned, the case is closed. The rest is up to the police; and all they have to do is to *get Kitty Enright!*"

Dahlberry shoved the pendants and blood-stained handkerchief in his pocket and turned to leave.

"Just a minute, Joe!" Ralph told him. "Dean may as well go with you. Dean, when you get outside, tell Larsen and Hartwick to go back to their routine work. Tell Chick Ellsman and Mo Erlman the same when they phone in. Meanwhile you take charge down at the office. I'm going to my hotel to get some sleep. Up all night, you know. And say, when the boys on the Federal beat ask you about the Elise Armond case, just tell them that we're through and refer them to Captain Creave. You hear?"

I followed Detective Dahlberry out, and I obeyed Ralph's instructions; but I was puzzled. It seemed to me that Ralph had been too quick to drop the case and turn everything over to the police; but I had learned from experience that his judgment was invariably sound. By the time I reached our office I was ready to forget the Elise Armond case and take up my routine work again.

THE forenoon passed with nothing of interest developing. On my return from lunch I bought a paper and found the Armond affair under the scare-head: "DOPE DEATH STARTS HUNT FOR MYSTERY GIRL." The gist of the story was that Elise Armond had fallen in with George Caro Flores and a "mystery woman," that the three had held a "snow party," and as a result of the drug orgy the Armond girl had died and Flores had committed suicide at the police station. Acting on information furnished by a former member of a drug ring, police and government agents had searched a room in a downtown hotel and had uncovered evidence that disclosed the identity of the mystery woman and definitely linked her with the Armond affair.

Then followed a paragraph that contained news for me:

> While the police are searching for the third member of the snow party, U. S. Narcotic Agents Hardy and Ellsman leave at one-thirty for an automobile trip along the coast to the Mexican border. Spurred to renewed activity by the Armond tragedy, the government agents are determined to locate the source of the contraband cocaine and stop it

Sudden trips to the border were nothing unusual for us, but I was surprised that Ralph had given that item to the papers before apprising me of his plans. I was awaiting a phone message from him when a visitor was announced.

The man who stepped into the room was a gray-haired man of perhaps fifty. I remember how his hand shook as he stepped up and laid on the desk before me a small piece of paper on which were a few colorless crystals. "I suppose," he said, "you know what that is?"

I picked up one of the crystals and touched it to my tongue. Instantly the tip of my tongue felt cold and numb.

"That's cocaine," I told him. "In the slang of the underworld, you have a 'bindle o' C'. Where'd you get it?"

He sighed, and drew up the chair I indicated. "I don't want to give you my name unless it is absolutely necessary," he said quietly. "But I read about the Armond affair and I'm worried. My boy—he's twenty—and he hasn't been acting right for over two months. Erratic, nervous, sleepless, hot-tempered. Not at all like himself. Last night his mother found that in his clothes and brought it to me. We watched, and when he missed it he hunted frantically. After a while he went to the phone and I heard him say: *'Charley is gone and I must see you at once. . . . . Where? . . . . All right.'* Then he hurried out. He came back about midnight, terribly nervous. He would not tell me where he had been. After I read about the Armond girl, I—I decided to ask your help."

"'Charley is gone,'" I repeated. *"'Charley'* is a code word for cocaine, just as *Mary* is frequently used for morphine. What number did your boy call?"

He took a slip of paper from his vest pocket.

"He called *Park 80-W*. When he got the number, he said *'Is this Nita?'"*

"Nita!" I fairly shouted the name at him. "Man, you've given us the very clue we want!"

"Write down your name and phone number," I told the caller while I held my thumb on the red button on our inter-office phone switch. Hazel answered at once. "Phone Mr. Hardy at his hotel!" I ordered, glancing up at the wall clock. "Keep ringing until you get him. Tell him I'm on my way and for him to wait for me."

Without taking time to note the name, I snatched up the paper the man shoved across the desk to me and thrust it in my pocket. "You must excuse me now," I told him. "I have to catch Mr. Hardy before he leaves. We'll phone you later."

In less than two minutes I was hopping into a taxi at the Federal stand. I gave the address and told the driver to make it snappy. He knew his business, and he knew enough of ours to lose no time; but, as usually happens in such cases, a traffic jam at an up-town crossing held us up.

I got to Ralph's hotel at last, and hurried up to his room, thrummed my code rap on the panel and the door swung open. I stepped in—and halted in astonishment.

The man who had admitted me was a shabbily dressed, hard-looking character with a peak cap pulled low over his shifty eyes and a stained cigarette drooping from the corner of his mouth. By the reading table sat a severely dressed young woman wearing dark glasses and holding a sample case in her lap. Opposite her was a handsome man of dignified bearing, a man I took at first glance to be a foreigner. He was clad in solemn black with a high, white collar and a flowing black tie. His

complexion was swarthy, his hair and eyebrows very black. He wore pince-nez glasses to which was attached a black silk cord. As I entered, he arose and bowed.

"Greeting, señor! Do me the honor to be seated while the señorita completes her report. In other words," he snapped out abruptly—"flop an' get an earful!"

"Ralph!" I exclaimed. And then, of course, I recognized Winifred and Chick Ellsman. "But what—what does this mean? Aren't you going to the border?"

"Confound it, Dean!" exploded Ralph, resuming his seat; "do I always have to draw a map of everything for you? Couldn't you figure out that when Mazetti accused Kitty Enright of being in the game with Flores he would back up that lie by having Dorman plant something in Kitty's room? Couldn't you see that Creave and I were putting up a job on Squarehead Joe Dahlberry—that we wanted him to *see* what Mazetti had planted so he would tell the reporters just the story we wanted published—just the story that would make Mazetti and his gang think they were safe—that after the scare I gave them through Dorman they had succeeded in pulling the wool over our eyes? Go to the border? Why, dammit, man, we're going to stay right here and smash Mazetti and his ring inside of forty-eight hours! Got that through your head? Good! Now what in thunder is—" He gestured to Win, who handed me a torn bit of yellowed paper.

"*Erythroxylon Coca Lamarck,*" I read aloud. "Why, that's the botanical name of the coca bush. The old Incas, and the South American natives of today, perform prodigious feats just by chewing the light-green foliage; but by grinding the leaves and exhausting them in a solution of alcohol and sulphuric acid, the alkaloid precipitates and we get what is commercially known as *crystal cocaine.* If you want me to draw a map—"

Again I heard that pistol-crack of thumb and finger. Ralph leaned forward, his eyes gleaming. "Go on, Win! You were saying—"

CHAPTER VI

WINIFRED WORTH had the faculty of inspiring confidence and getting people to talk about themselves. In her guise as an agent for a cosmetic manufacturer she had called on Cynthia Eliza Armond, had wheedled every scrap of information from her, and had even been permitted to look into Elise's room. Learning nothing of any value to us, Winifred had then called on her next "prospect"—Nita O'Neill.

"That girl puzzles me," Win told us. "She's flashy in a way; and yet she's deep. She acts like a girl whose heart is dead, but who is on fire with some desperate scheme, something that she has brooded over until it completely dominates her. She uses cocaine; but that doesn't explain her. It's something else, and you'd better handle that girl with gloves.

"The phone rang several times while I was there, but I never could hear what the other person said and what Miss O'Neill said was meaningless. But—after each call she would excuse herself and go into the kitchen. On the pretext of wanting a drink of water, I followed her once, but the kitchen door was locked. I listened, but could hear nothing. When she came out, she pretended that the door became locked accidentally—and invited me in. So far as I could see there was nothing about that kitchen different than any other. There was no outside door, and the one window was curtained and open only a few inches from the top.

"While we were in the bathroom and I was demonstrating Dr. Potter's Peruvian Pomade, the phone rang again. While Nita answered, I took a quick look through her medicine cabinet. That's when I found this." Win laid the yellowed bit of paper on the table. "I had already learned that Miss O'Neill used to work for the Rincon Exporting Company and I got the idea that word *coca* didn't refer to a breakfast drink. Eh, Mr. Dean?"

"The *coca* bush from which we get cocaine and the *cacao* bush from which we get the cocoa bean, are entirely different," I said. "Addicts sometimes steal a jar of coca leaves and soak them in alcohol to extract the cocaine. That's probably how that old label happened to be in Miss O'Neill's medicine-chest. But, Ralph, I have some information for you!"

I told about the man who had called at the office, and gave Ralph the slip of paper bearing the caller's name and telephone number. To my surprise, Ralph was only mildly interested.

"We might scare him into telling something we need to know," he remarked thoughtfully; "but we'd also be taking a chance of scaring our game. They feel secure now; and by taking things slowly we're going to bag the whole outfit.

"You see, Dean, the dopes who phone for their stuff know no one but Nita O'Neill, and they never see her. She's the blind for the ring. It's a new stunt, and a clever one.

"Suppose we grab an addict who buys from the ring's agents. All he knows is that he phones Nita O'Neill and the stuff is delivered to him. But Nita keeps nothing in her room. She doesn't know where the ring keeps their plant. When she gets an order, she relays it to a messenger for the ring. She probably doesn't even know who that messenger is, has never seen any of them. So if we raid her room, we find nothing; and she can tell us nothing. Understand?"

"That *is* a new stunt!" I exclaimed; "and a clever one! But—what about these snow parties? Elise Armond always phoned Nita O'Neill before she went to one of those parties. Where are they held?"

"That," said Ralph rising, "is where we are still in the dark; but I think we'll turn up some good stuff within an hour. I was just going to phone you when Hazel told me you were on your way here. While I put a few things in my bag, you hop into the other room and get into 'rough.'"

The "other room" was where we kept the material for such simple disguises as we had found useful. When I stepped into that room I was a slender chap, a bit pale, slightly stooped from too much desk work, and I wore glasses. It wouldn't have taken a Sherlock Holmes to "make" me as perfectly harmless office slave.

The man who emerged ten minutes later, wore a wool shirt, a rough felt hat, and a coat that gave him a stocky appearance. His eyes—due to the absence of the glasses—were already puffy and dilated, while a mangled cigar clenched between his jaws completed the transformation.

"—and canvass the neighborhood thoroughly," Ralph was telling Win as I rejoined them. "Chick, you float around there and pick up what you can. Keep one eye on what goes on behind Dean and me. Dean, if you were as mean as you look, you ought to be shot! Maybe you will be! And now—" He rattled off a few instructions, and we separated.

I got off the street car at Park and Elm and strolled into the corner cigar-store. Over the purchase of a cigar I inquired if there was a good place near by to eat.

"Nearest place is the Quetzal Palace," the clerk replied. "I don't recommend it, though."

"The Quetzal Palace!" My surprise was real. Ralph had never explained why he had asked me the meaning of that word. "Where is the Quetzal?" I asked, lighting my cigar.

"Down Elm Street. About the middle of the next block. You got to look sharp or you'll miss it. Funny place, that; but I guess they do a good business. Lot o' cars stop there between noon and midnight."

"Spanish, is it?"

"Yeah. Or Mexican. But darned poor grub and damned high prices. I don't see how they get by. No music, no dancing, no entertainment of any kind. Funny—"

He turned away to wait on another customer, and I left.

I SAW the place from across the street. It occupied the basement of a two-story frame dwelling. The one window of the basement was curtained and bore only the name: "The Quetzal Palace." The two floors above appeared to be unoccupied. The shades were drawn at all the windows; old papers fluttered about in the wind on the porch and on the dusty stairs.

Next door to this building, and setting flush against it, was the frame apartment house in which Nita O'Neill lived.

I strolled down to the end of the block, crossed over, and came back. Ralph's cryptic instructions now began to take on meaning.

As if to block the way, a man stepped directly in front of me as I entered the Quetzal Palace. Apparently he was the headwaiter, but he seemed to eye me as with hostility as if he recognized me as an intruder instead of a patron. As I looked at him, I became aware that just on my right was a semi-circular counter with a swarthy-faced man standing before a cash register. Two other waiters were moving about among the tables, at which sat half a dozen or so diners. One of

them, a handsome, dignified "foreigner" with a silk cord attached to his nose glasses, was apparently much interested in reading an old copy of *La Republica* while waiting for his order.

I flashed the "buzzer" Ralph had given me. "City license inspector," I said gruffly.

The headwaiter spoke rapidly in a tongue that resembled Spanish but which I could not identify. The cashier grunted, and handed out the city restaurant license.

"Is anything wrong?" the headwaiter asked in stilted English.

I pretended I did not hear him. I was staring at the license. Was this what Ralph had expected me to "turn over"?

The license for "The Quetzal Palace" was in the name of Juanita Rincon.

JUANITA RINCON! Was she the woman who drove the gray sedan belonging to Denver Rincon, president of the Rincon Exporting Company? Or was this just another name for Nita O'Neill?

"Did you think anything was wrong?" I fired back as the headwaiter repeated his question.

"No. But—"

"Usual inspection!" I cut in. "How long you been open?"

"About six months. We've paid two quarterly licenses."

"Who's Juanita Rincon? What's her address?"

"She's been away for about a month. I think in Los Angeles. She left me in charge."

I looked at him and had just decided that he was telling what he, at least, believed to be the truth, when I heard Ralph clear his throat with an intonation that I at once knew to be a signal for me to "lay off."

"Doesn't matter," I said, and started toward the kitchen. "When was the health inspector here last?"

"About a month ago," the headwaiter answered, dogging my steps. "He didn't find anything wrong."

I kept on, passed through the large, gloomy dining-room to a railed-off space in which were a piano and a few chairs, the piano covered, the chairs stacked. Crossing this, I came to a passageway masked by a heavy drape. Looking down this gloomy hallway I saw, on each side, a row of private dining booths.

As I walked on, followed closely by the headwaiter, I listened. The partitions of each booth, I observed, extended clear to the ceiling—an unusual thing; and from them came no sound. Curious, I flung aside one of the heavy portieres—and discovered a solid door.

"We never close these doors when the private dining-rooms are occupied," the headwaiter spoke up hastily. He reached past me to shove the door wide, and urged me in. "We obey the law strictly here," he declared.

I saw nothing unusual in the room, and passed on. Swinging doors at the end of the hall opened into the kitchen, a clean, orderly place. I saw no stairway, no rear exit except through the kitchen, nothing whatever to arouse any suspicion.

"Everything seems to be o. k.," I told the headwaiter.

As I went out through the dining-room, I noticed that Ralph was nibbling away at a pepper omelet but was apparently more interested in his paper. The man at the cash register turned his back as I passed. The headwaiter opened the door and bowed me out, but I noticed he didn't invite me to come again.

I strolled on down the street, my intention being to cross over and watch the Quetzal Palace until Ralph came out; but just as I was turning down the other side I met Chick. He gave me "the office," and I stopped, gazed in a shop window a minute, then followed him. I found him waiting in a stairway around the corner.

"Did you see her?" he demanded eagerly.

I stared at him. "See whom? Where?"

"Great Scott, Dean! Didn't you see that gray sedan parked right in front of the restaurant? Didn't you see that black-eyed dame piking you off as you came out?"

"I saw what the chief told me to look for," I retorted testily. "I didn't look for anything else."

"Well, you missed something you want to be watching out for! That sedan drove up just a minute after you went in. Might have been tailing you, for all I know. The woman started to go into the restaurant, but some one inside must have flashed her a signal, for she went back and sat down in the car. And after you had come out, instead of then going into the joint, she whips the car around

and beats it down Elm. Dean, we got to get Ralph out of there! He isn't fooling that bunch half as much as he thinks he is. They'll—"

"I don't think we need worry," I broke in. "Ralph can take care of himself. And as for that woman getting excited on seeing me, they have no reason to suspect that I was anything more than a city license inspector."

"Mebbe," grunted Chick. "What did you see in the Quetzal?"

I described the lay-out of the place; then, last of all, I told him about the name that was on the city license.

"Juanita Rincon!" he echoed. "Who'n thunder is she? Denver is the only Rincon listed in any directory. He lives at the Kurtzler. Isn't married. Hasn't any relatives so far as we could learn. Juanita Rincon? Wonder if that's Nita O'Neill under another name—or maybe Rincon is her name!"

"I don't think so. The headwaiter told me that Juanita Rincon is in Los Angeles, but I'm sure he was lying. You find your black-eyed lady and you'll have Juanita Rincon, the head of the cocaine ring. If you see Ralph, tell him what I've reported and that I'm off to attend to the other job he gave me."

"Wish I knew how to get him out o' that dump," Chick said gloomily as I turned to leave.

I paid no attention to that. Chick was always worrying, always looking on the darkest side of everything. A glance at my watch warned me that it was later than I had thought, and I stepped into a drug-store to call a taxi. A moment later when I got into the taxi I had the feeling that I was being watched. I had learned never to ignore those "hunches," and I looked around quickly but saw no one who appeared to be interested in me. I concluded that it was all imagination; but as the taxi rolled on its way down town, the feeling persisted.

CHAPTER VII

RALPH had said that Inspectors Larsen and Hartwick would be waiting for me at his room, but they were not there. I called our office and was informed that they had not reported in. Expecting to hear from them any minute I peeled off my big coat and hurried into our change room. I had scrubbed my face and, much to my relief, had got my glasses back on, when I heard the phone ringing.

There were always two phones in Ralph's room: the hotel phone that made connection through the hotel switchboard, and a private line that made direct connection with central. This private line was used only by our own men and in making calls that we didn't want to "leak" through the hotel switchboard. As I hastened to answer, I noticed that the call was on the hotel phone. This reminded me that, officially, U. S. Narcotic Agent Ralph Hardy had left for the border.

"Hello," I answered. "Who's calling?"

"Mr. Hardy?" It was a woman's voice, so low I could hardly understand her.

"This is Mr. Hardy's assistant," I told her. "Who—"

"Listen, please!" the girl broke in. "This is Kitty Enright. Please come—"

"Kitty Enright!" I shouted. "Speak louder! Where are you?"

"I don't dare speak louder. I am in danger. Get help and come at once. I am—"

"Yes! You are where?"

"Come to—"

A shrill scream clattered in my ear; then a crash; then silence. Frantically, I called, but there was no answer. Leaving the receiver off the hook I dashed downstairs to ask the operator to trace back that call; but she had already disconnected the lines. With every other trunk line busy, and guests waiting for connections, there was no hope. I went back upstairs and found that the inspectors had just come in.

"We got it!" exclaimed Larsen. "Rincon is buying seventy ounces o' C from the Mitcheld Drug Company. His truck is going to call for it at three. We got to hustle."

"Can't help it if he's buying a carload!" I replied, running hurriedly through the Q's in the telephone directory. Finding the Quetzal Palace not listed, I called "Information," using our private line so that in case Kitty Enright did get a chance to ring me again she would not find the line busy. I got the number and then put in my call. A moment later I was speaking to some one at the Quetzal. I stated that I had an urgent call for "Doctor Raphael" who was dining there. I described Ralph as I had seen him nibbling at a pepper and pretending to read *"La Republica."*

"The señor was here, but he just left,"

Before we could prevent it, the other two were upon Rincon; the driver struck him in the mouth with his handcuffed wrists.

came the surly reply, followed by the click of the phone as the Quetzal hung up.

I debated what to do. Recalling that scream, it seemed to me there was little chance of Kitty Enright calling again; but I felt that Ralph should know as soon as possible what had happened. So, explaining the situation to Larsen, I sent him in haste to the neighborhood of the Quetzal to hunt for Ralph. Then—I sat down to wait.

PRESENTLY Hartwick spoke up.

"How did it happen that Kitty Enright called the chief here? Why didn't she phone him at the office?"

"She probably remembered this number," I replied. "She called Ralph here this morning. That's how we got on this case."

He was silent a moment, then went on: "Of course, if there's any chance of her phoning again, we should be here. But I don't think there is. And I hate to lose this opportunity to see how Rincon works his game." Hartwick glanced at his watch. "In about twenty minutes, Rincon's truck is due to call for seventy ounces. And he makes these shipments only once a month."

I hesitated. It was important that we follow up the Rincon lead; and the more I thought it over the more certain I felt that Kitty had lost all chance of letting us know where she was being kept.

"Larsen and I went to the office of the Collector of Internal Revenue and checked the narcotic reports for the past year," Hartwick continued. "Rincon has been shipping hospital supplies to South America for some time; but it was only about six months ago he began exporting cocaine. He gets exactly seventy ounces every month—all from the Mitcheld Drug Company. And he ships the cocaine, with other drugs and hospital supplies, to the same hospital every month."

"Seventy ounces every month!" I echoed, amazed. "Why, that's ridiculous!"

"That's what I thought. What is the average medical dose o' coke?"

"Administered hypodermically, the average amount of cocaine a physician will give a patient not an addict is from an eighth to a quarter grain. And there are four hundred and eighty grains to an ounce. Figure it out!"

Hartwick got out a pencil and notebook.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed presently. "Seventy ounces a month would give about ten thousand patients a big shot every day! Must be a big hospital with a flock o' people suffering pain. Eh?"

I agreed to that!

"And that makes me all the more eager to run down to Mitcheld's place and see if we can get wise to how Rincon gets his stuff," continued Hartwick. "No use in you waiting for another ring—"

Both Hartwick and I jumped as the telephone bell jangled. This time, I noticed, the call was coming in on our private line. "Dean speaking," I answered, feeling sure it was Ralph calling me.

"Say, Dean, this is Chick," the gloomy voice of Ellsman sighed in my ear. "Isn't Ralph there?"

"No, he isn't. I just sent Larsen—"

"I know. Larsen is here. That's why I'm ringing. He says you phoned that joint and that they told you Ralph had left. I never saw him leave! An', Dean, I been layin' on that lousy joint with both lamps! I'm afraid—"

"As usual—you're afraid something is wrong," I broke in. "Well, don't worry about Ralph. Better stick around there as he told you, but shoot Larsen back here in a hurry. I want him to hold down this phone while Hartwick and I go out."

INSPECTOR HARTWICK and I got ready to leave, and as soon as Larsen arrived we were on our way. As I stepped into the taxi that feeling came over me again that I was being watched. I looked around, but could see no one who seemed to be paying any attention to us. So I dismissed the thought of being followed and fell to thinking of the problem before us.

Whatever Rincon's game was, I felt certain that Jeffrey Mitcheld, founder of the house of Mitcheld, had no part in it; and I concluded that I would go direct to him and tell him exactly why the government was interested in Rincon's purchases of cocaine. Accordingly, I left Hartwick to wait in the taxi while I entered the main office and sent in my card.

A moment later I had explained the situation to Mr. Mitcheld.

"Difficult situation for us, Mr. Dean," he said. "I know that no hospital needs that much cocaine a month. It's either being used illegally down there, or is being smuggled back into this country. But, in either case, what can I do? I can't have an investigation made of every order we get for narcotics. Rincon comes to us with your own government order form. If I don't give him what the order calls for, he'll get it some place else—and take all his other drug business with him."

"I'm not investigating your house!" I hastened to explain. "Every one in touch with the dope situation knows that stuff is shipped to foreign countries every day with the sole idea of smuggling it right back into the country. So long as the export regulations are obeyed, we can do nothing."

"Have you examined any of the stuff that Rincon *imports* from South America?"

"Not yet."

"Ah! There are many—" The telephone interrupted. Mr. Mitcheld answered, then turned to me. "Rincon's order is to be prepared now. You wish to go with me? I am the only one who knows the combination to our narcotic vault, and I have the only key."

"Exactly what I want to do," I said, and followed Mr. Mitcheld through a private doorway into an adjoining room. The only furniture here was a long table bearing materials for wrapping and labeling packages. The vault had been built in one end of the room.

"Does Rincon suspect that his business is under investigation by the government?" asked Mr. Mitcheld as he bent over to work the combination. "I should think that Elise Armond case would have scared him into canceling this order if there was anything crooked about it."

"On the contrary, he was probably afraid to cancel it for fear that would attract attention. Besides, if he's merely shipping cocaine *out of the country*, there's nothing wrong about that; however, I don't want to be seen when his man comes for the seventy ounces."

MR. MITCHELD nodded, and swung the heavy vault door open. With a long, flat key which he carried on a chain, he then unlocked the inner door. Glancing over his shoulder I saw that the vault

held a small fortune in morphine, cocaine, heroin, and other narcotics.

Mr. Mitcheld was grunting over the task of getting the jars of cocaine off the shelf at the back of the vault when a clerk entered. The clerk finished the job, then Mr. Mitcheld started to close the vault.

"Please set out two more jars, Mr. Mitcheld. And leave the door open a minute," I said.

He gave me a surprised look, but set out the jars. I then shuffled the seventy-two jars on the table until none of us could pick out those last two. Taking out two jars at random, I instructed the clerk to do likewise. One of the two he selected, I handed back to him with one of the two I had selected. Mr. Mitcheld then put those two back in the vault and locked the doors. I picked up the two jars chosen for testing and began my examination.

Since crystal cocaine must be protected from the light, each jar had been carefully wrapped; and over the top—there were no government stamps in those days—was a seal bearing the manufacturer's name and guarantee of the purity of the contents. Breaking the seals, I removed the corks and from each jar took out a few of the large, colorless crystals and touched them with the tip of my tongue.

"Cocaine, of course," I said, replacing the corks and adjusting the broken seals. "I don't suppose that hospital in South America will object to these two jars having been opened?"

"Let 'em object!" grunted Mr. Mitcheld. "Better hurry, John! Rincon's man will be here any minute."

THE clerk speedily packed the seventy jars, putting them in two layers of five-by-seven in a strong wooden container. Each end of this box, I observed, bore the name, address, and trade-mark of the Mitcheld Drug Company, as did the shipping label which the clerk had already pasted on the lid and protected with a heavy coat of transparent varnish. When this lid had been securely nailed, the ends of two metal strips, already nailed to the rest of the box, were then drawn across the lid and nailed down. Where the ends joined, the clerk affixed a brown wax seal bearing the imprint of the Mitcheld Drug Company.

"Can't get in that box without breaking our seal," Mr. Mitcheld pointed out. "Anyway, the box is never in Rincon's possession long enough for any crooked work. He makes up his export papers for the other stuff he is shipping, and includes this box. He loads his stuff and his truck stops here on its way to the dock. His man hands me a draft or certified check for the seventy ounces, adds this package to the stuff already on the truck, and in ten minutes the whole consignment is out of his hands. John, bring that box into my office; then let me know when Rincon's man is here. I never let narcotics out of my sight, Mr. Dean," he added.

We started back to Mr. Mitcheld's office, but at that moment the door to the main office opened and a clerk announced that Rincon's truck was waiting. I stepped back until John had gone through the doorway, leaving the door open; then I got quickly to where I could see what went on without being seen myself.

Rincon's man was standing by the main office counter not ten feet from me. There was something about his appearance that instantly reminded me of the headwaiter at the Quetzal Palace, but I was certain that I had not seen this man before. When he had receipted for the box of cocaine and had handed over the certified check, he put the box on his shoulder and hurried out.

I followed. I was eager to see what name he had signed to that book, but I was afraid to take the time. The man was already outside. He had put the box down and was getting out a bunch of keys. By that time I was at the front door and could see the truck. It was a small delivery truck, painted black, and entirely enclosed. The double doors at the rear were padlocked.

The padlock removed, one of these doors swung open. The man picked up the box of cocaine and set it just inside the door. Closing the door again, he snapped the padlock in the staples and started toward the driver's seat.

I stepped quickly to where Hartwick was waiting in our taxi, and gave our driver instructions. During the five minutes' run to the wharf, that black truck was never out of our sight. Not once did it stop; not once did any other car come suspiciously near it.

Arrived at the wharf, I got out and hastened to where Rincon's truck had stopped. Mingling with truckers, Customs inspectors, and others, I stood not fifteen feet away when Rincon's man unlocked

the truck doors. There was the box, just as I had seen it when the doors were shut back at Mitcheld's.

I watched the man check in all his stuff, including the box of cocaine, and saw him get his receipt. As I started back to our taxi, I passed within three feet of that box and positively identified it as the one I had seen packed at the Mitcheld Drug Company's shipping room. Obviously there was nothing wrong at this end.

A MAN in blue-and-white jumpers and wearing an expressman's cap was talking with Hartwick as I came up. Hartwick slipped out of the taxi. The expressman got in, gave an order to the driver.

"Hop in, quick, Dean!" said Hartwick as he passed me. "That's the chief!"

Astonished, I made a dive for the taxi. The driver reached back, slammed the door, and we were off.

"Ralph!" I exclaimed. "What does this mean? Where are we going? Chick was worried about you and—"

"Chick told me about it," Ralph said, hastily doffing his jumper. "I was at the Quetzal when you telephoned. Don't know whether that dumbbell didn't understand that you wanted me, or if he was just lying. When I left, I connected with Chick and got into our taxi to make this change. I intended to try to deliver a package at those flats over the Quetzal, but—"

"They're vacant, Ralph. I made sure of that from across the street. The front porch is covered with dust and old papers, shades down, 'n' everything."

Ralph nodded, as he put on his hat. "When Chick told me what Larsen had said about Rincon getting seventy ounces at three o'clock, I hustled right down. I didn't even ask Chick what you had seen in the Quetzal. Go on and spill it."

I told him. He showed no surprise when informed that the name on the city license was Juanita Rincon, and was only mildly interested when I related what Chick had said about the dark-eyed woman driving up in the gray sedan while he and I were in the Quetzal. He listened closely when I described the private dining-rooms, but made no comment.

"There is no room to hold snow parties in the Quetzal," I finished. "So it seems to me we haven't done much, Ralph. About all we know is that Nita O'Neill is a blind for the ring, and that Denver Rincon ships cocaine to South America to be smuggled back. That's—"

"You got your rod?" Ralph demanded abruptly.

"Sure!" I replied. "But—"

"Get it ready!" . . . The taxi was slowing down. . . . "Now! Out that door on your side! Quick! Grab the first man you see!"

The taxi ground to a jarring halt. My government .38 ready, I jumped out and ran forward. There, by the curb just ahead, was Rincon's truck! A man I had not seen before was looking back at us as he got hurriedly to the pavement. "Put 'em up!" I ordered, keeping him covered as I ran toward him. "This is a pinch!"

I'll never forget the murderous look that came into that man's dark face. Swift as the dart of a snake, he drew an automatic.

I could have shot him, and perhaps have been shot. Instead, I made a swift downward slash with my revolver. The blow must have almost broken his wrist. The gun fell from his fingers.

He bent over. I thought his object was to try to regain his revolver, and I drove my left fist at his jaw. But he tricked me. Ignoring the gun, he hurled himself straight at me. With terrific force his head drove into my stomach. I went backward; my head struck the pavement—and I was out.

CHAPTER VIII

"DEAN! Dean!" Ralph's voice seemed to come from far off. Dizzily, I struggled to my feet and leaned against the side of the truck. Lying on the pavement just back of the truck was Rincon's driver. Beside him lay the man who had knocked me out. Their faces were bloody, handcuffs on their wrists.

Ralph was fitting a key in the padlock on the truck doors. Opening both doors, he seized one of the prisoners by the collar and jerked him to his feet. Then he pulled the other man up and was shoving both of them into the truck, when one of the men turned and tried to bite Ralph's hand. Swift as the lash of a whip, Ralph struck him a blow between the eyes and he went down.

Ralph slammed the truck doors shut and snapped the padlock.

"You're too damn' gentle!" he snarled at me. "Minute more an' that bird would 'a' killed you. How d'you feel?"

"All right," I said; "but—"

"Then hop in that taxi and do just as I say. Bust over to Elm Street and get Chick Ellsman. You'll find him somewhere around the Quetzal. Then drive like hell to the United States Attorney's office and swear out a search warrant for Rincon's place o' business and another for his room at the Kurtzler. While you're getting the warrants phone my room and tell Larsen to meet you somewhere near Rincon's. When you get to Rincon's, leave Chick and Larsen there and you bring Denver Rincon to my office. You hear?"

I heard—and I went; found Chick Ellsman; got the search warrants; phoned Larsen; and the three of us descended on the place of business of the Rincon Exportation Company.

Denver Rincon, a man of perhaps forty, with more than a suggestion of the Indian in his high cheek bones, swarthy skin and keen, black eyes, betrayed not the slightest emotion when I read the search warrant. When I told him he was wanted at our office, he called an assistant to take charge and, without a word, accompanied me out. He said nothing on our way to the Custom-house; and neither did I.

But I'll never forget the look that came into Rincon's face when we walked into Ralph Hardy's private office.

THE two prisoners stood just beyond Ralph's long, flat-top desk. At one end of the desk, looking as mystified as I felt, was Inspector Hartwick. Beside him was a man in U. S. Customs uniform—guarding the box I had seen Rincon's man deliver at the wharf.

Ralph, still in his expressman's outfit, was at the other end of the desk. Beside him was Hartwell, Collector of Internal Revenue. And on the desk before them was a box *exactly like the one Rincon's man had delivered at the wharf!*

"Collector," said Ralph, "when I heard that Denver Rincon was shipping seventy ounces of cocaine to a hospital in South America I had reason to suspect that there might be something crooked about it, notwithstanding Rincon's previous good record.

"Besides, shipping of exactly seventy ounces every month, buying it always from the same wholesaler, and billing it always to the same hospital, struck me as something worth investigating. Rincon, who's your agent at that hospital?"

Denver Rincon curled his lips.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," he said sarcastically. "When the proper time comes I may have something to say—and I may not. For the present—" He made a curt gesture of dismissal.

"When the time comes!" echoed Ralph. "Well, Rincon, your time has come! Collector, the man in South America who gets these shipments is a member of the most dangerous cocaine ring we've ever tackled. And this man—Denver Rincon—is the brains of the whole crooked bunch!

"When I got down to Mitcheld's place, Inspector Dean was then inside. Rincon's truck was just backing up to the curb. It was a closed truck with the two rear doors padlocked; and I was curious to see what was inside. When the driver had gone into Mitcheld's, I strolled up beside the truck—and I heard a man try to smother a cough—a man who was inside the truck! There's the man—handcuffed to Rincon's driver!

"Right then I got out of there. I believed I saw through the game. Seventy ounces of cocaine could be bought legally for around seven hundred dollars; sold illegally it would bring close to ten thousand. Denver Rincon wasn't going to trust that with one man.

"I followed that truck to the dock. I saw that box"—he pointed to the one in front of the Customs officer—"delivered with other stuff to be shipped to South America.

"Inspector Dean and I then followed Rincon's truck. I intended to explain to Dean just what I suspected, but I waited. I wasn't sure, myself, just how they worked their game. And I wanted to see where those two men were going. I wanted to see what they took out of that truck.

"But they must have spotted us, for they stopped suddenly. Inspector Dean and I placed both men under arrest. Dean then went to get Denver Rincon while I brought in the truck and the prisoners. And, Collector, in that truck was this box. Can you tell them apart?"

Hartwell shook his head.

"Neither can I!" exclaimed Ralph. "Dean, get these boxes open!"

WITH a hatchet from the stock-room I tackled the boxes. Opening them was no easy job, for the metal bands were strong and the whole box securely nailed. As I worked at them I realized that Ralph

was right. The boxes could not be told one from the other.

Finally I had them open, the packing out, and a few jars from each box placed on the table. Over each jar, securely attached to the cork, was the manufacturer's seal. Collector Hartwell and I broke the seals on several jars from each box, poured out a few of the large, colorless, odorless crystals, and tested them. I remember how we looked up at each other.

"Well!" snapped Ralph, "this box we seized with Rincon's truck—what is it?"

"Ten thousand dollars worth of crystal cocaine!" Hartwell replied promptly.

"And this one—that was going to South America?"

"About ten dollars worth of alum."

There was a silence—broken by the crackle of a match. I remember how we started—and looked quickly at Denver Rincon.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" he inquired sarcastically, and with steady hand put the flame to his cigarette.

Ralph ignored him. He stepped to the other end of the table, completely emptied the box that was to be shipped to South America, and examined it carefully. He shook his head.

"Collector, I still don't see any signs of this box having been opened. Must have been as I said—they took their time and carefully loosened the seals and pried off the lid.

"Here's my guess as to how they worked: The first time they bought seventy ounces of cocaine from Mitcheld for shipment to South America, they took the box to some safe place, loosened the seals, pried off the lid, and emptied the seventy ounces of cocaine into some other container. To play safe, they probably shipped that first lot of coke; but what they really wanted was the box and the jars.

"They then filled the seventy jars with alum, replaced the manufacturer's seals, and sealed up the box again. When they went to Mitcheld's for the next shipment of cocaine, they took along their dummy box. The switching then was easy. The box of alum went to their confederate in South America; the box of cocaine stayed right here, was opened in the same manner, and got ready for the following month. How about it, Rincon?"

"*Ad*-mirable!" And Rincon's dark face lighted with a smile that was anything but pleasant. "I—ah—understand that is exactly how it was done! But, of course, I had nothing to do with it—*personally*. In fact, I don't quite understand by what authority you have summarily dragged me down here. I happen to know the Federal narcotic law as well as you know it; and let me tell you something right now! I—*personally*—have never *sold* any cocaine nor ever had it in my *possession*. There is no charge that you could lawfully bring against me. Therefore, so far as I am concerned—*personally*—your high-handed conduct is absolutely unwarranted and I'll make you smart for it. Is that clear?"

"*Ad*-mirable!" mimicked Ralph. "I—ah—had an idea that was exactly how you handled your dirty game—*personally*. Well, let *me* tell *you* something! There's a Federal law that was written to take care of just such crooks as you. Never heard o' Section 332, of the Criminal Code, eh?"

Rincon paled.

"I thought not," Ralph went on. "That's the Conspiracy Act. You may not have violated the Narcotic Act, but you *conspired* to have these poor devils violate it and take all the risks while you gobbled up most of the profits. Under the Conspiracy Act, Rincon, you're going to the penitentiary—where you belong. Dean, phone the police to send the wagon for three Federal prisoners."

I reached for the receiver and at that instant the bell rang. "Federal narcotic office," I answered.

A WOMAN'S voice, so faint I could hardly hear her, made me turn quickly to look at Ralph. "This is Kitty Enright. Is Mr. Hardy there?"

"Kitty Enright!" I echoed, nodding to Ralph. "Yes, Mr. Hardy is here." I started to hand Ralph the phone, but he made a sudden dive for the door to the main office. "Just a minute, Kitty," I went on. "Where are you?"

"I'm not where I was when I called you awhile ago," she answered excitedly. "They nearly killed me for that. And they've taken me—"

Ralph had come back. He snatched the phone from my hands but gestured for me to hold my head down so I could hear.

"This is Hardy! Kitty, where are you?"

"Two men have brought me to the old Manuel Ricardi road-house—you know the place?"

"No! Where is it?"

"You go down the Ocean Highway to the Eighteen-Mile Corner. Then a mile west—toward the sea. I'm locked in one of the upstairs rooms. Please hurry!"

"Wouldn't it be better to wait until after dark?"

"No, no! They're going to leave again as soon as it's dark and they're quarreling right now over whether to take me on with them or to kill me and be done with it. You see, when I got you on the phone awhile ago it scared the gang. They've all scattered. Don't know where they've gone, but they were talking about Mexico. If you come right now you'll get these two. If you don't—"

"I'll send a couple men right off. Don't you—"

"No, no! Don't trust this to any one else. Come yourself—with help! Can't you understand that my life is in danger—that there's no time to waste?"

"I'll be there—on the jump! Don't you worry! The old Manuel Ricardi roadhouse, eh? Are you—"

The door from the main office was opened hurriedly. Hazel stepped in, nodded to Ralph.

"Are you all right, Kitty?" Ralph finished.

"Yes, but hurry!" The voice died to a mere whisper. "They're coming toward the house now! Please—"

Ralph hung up.

"See here!" I spoke quickly. "I can take you right to the Ricardi place! And we'd better get started! That old road off the highway through the woods hasn't been kept up and it's one of the worst—"

"It's one of the best places for a trap I've ever seen," Ralph cut in quietly. "Well, Hazel! Did I keep her talking long enough?"

Hazel nodded. "Operator traced that call, Mr. Hardy. It came from Park 80-W—Nita O'Neill."

Ralph's .38 leaped into his hand as the barrel of a gun came into view.

"I thought so!" grunted Ralph. "Felt pretty certain that Kitty wouldn't get a second chance to ring us but that the gang would make some use of it." He swung suddenly on Rincon. "Well, what do you know about this? Plannin' to murder a couple of us, eh?"

Since answering that call I had not thought to look at Denver Rincon. Now I was struck by the change that had come over the man. Gone was his haughty unconcern, the sneer on his lips, the contempt in his eyes; and in their place was a face ashen pale and eyes filled with stark fear.

"I—I don't know anything—about any trap," he stammered with evident truth. "And I didn't know they had abducted that Enright girl. I suspected something, but they lied to me—just as they have lied to me all along."

HE fell silent, bowing his head. It was plain that he was hesitating between the thought of disloyalty and the desire for revenge. For a moment Ralph watched him closely; then he turned to me.

"Dean, we'll gather in the rest of the gang now. Don't bother about search warrants. Got all the evidence we need to send 'em all over. Get the boys together and we'll smash in Nita O'Neill's joint right away. Snappy now!"

I started for the main office.

"Wait!" cried Rincon. "Wait a minute! Mr. Hardy, I—I must tell you something. And let me warn you! Don't bother with Nita O'Neill! That girl has been terribly wronged. She is not the guilty one. The one you want, the one behind all this, is—"

Ralph broke in with a cry. I saw him make a leap at Rincon, saw the flash of handcuffs. Interested in Rincon and what he was saying, I had almost forgotten the two other prisoners. Before Ralph could prevent it, they were upon Rincon. I saw the driver strike Rincon a vicious blow in the mouth with his handcuffed wrists; then Ralph was between them and over Ralph's shoulder one of the men was hurling a torrent of threatening words at Rincon in a language I could not understand.

"Take 'em out, Hartwick!" Ralph ordered, shoving the prisoners toward him.

Hartwick led the two men out.

"Now, Rincon," said Ralph; "what is it you want to say?"

Denver Rincon was leaning against the wall, breathing heavily. "Nothing," he muttered through bleeding lips; "absolutely nothing."

"You may as well talk," Ralph urged. "We'll find out everything anyway."

"You wont ever find it out through me," declared Rincon flatly. Then, as if on sudden impulse, he went on hurriedly: "But watch out for Miss O'Neill! She is in danger. Juanita Flores—she has no right to call herself Juanita Rincon—she has repeatedly accused Miss O'Neill of planning to save herself by going to the officials with the whole truth. Now that trouble has come, Miss O'Neill will get the blame. And Juanita Flores will kill her for it."

"I'll watch out for her," Ralph promised. "Juanita Rincon wont know—"

"But she knows already! Under the edge of my desk is a signal button that I was to use only in case of a raid. When I saw your men coming, I pressed that button. While your man was telling me I was under arrest, one of my men down in the basement was telephoning Nita O'Neill. Before I left my desk, Nita O'Neill knew that we had been raided and that I was to be taken away. I don't know if they will feel that it is safe for them to stay—where they are, or if they will run. And I don't know how much you know. But I'm telling you this much and no more: go and save Nita O'Neill before that she-devil can harm her!"

Ralph nodded. He was picking up the telephone. He called Captain Creave's office, then, while waiting for the connection, rattled off a string of orders to me.

Fifteen minutes later Denver Rincon and his two men were in jail; Chick Ellsman and two deputy marshals were on their way to see who they could find on that old road to Manuel Ricardi's; a force of men were surrounding the Quetzal Palace; and the rest of us were waiting in the hall while Winifred Worth tapped on the door of Nita O'Neill's apartment.

THERE was no answer.

Winifred put her ear to the panel, listened a moment, then rapped again. Presently she looked around at Ralph, who nodded. With the pass key we had obtained from the landlady, Winifred then unlocked the door.

We filed in quietly—Ralph, Winifred, Hartwick, Captain Creave, Doc Emery and I. So far as we could see, there was no one in the apartment. Winifred made a hasty search, whispered that there was nothing to indicate that Nita O'Neill had fled, and led the way to the kitchen.

Everything in the kitchen seemed to be in order. I remember thinking that Nita was apparently a very neat housekeeper, when I noticed that the door of a built-in wall cupboard stood partly open. Win observed this at the same time, opened the door wider, and beckoned quickly to Ralph.

We stepped to the cupboard and looked in. The rear wall, on which hung an apron and a few kitchen utensils, was swung out at one side, like a door left ajar. Motioning to us to be quiet, Ralph cautiously drew the door back farther, disclosing a passageway not more than three feet long and just large enough for a man of average size to squeeze through.

At the end of this passageway was a plain board door.

"There's the trick!" whispered Ralph "Couldn't have done such a thing except in an old part of the town like this where a lot o' houses are built right jam up against each other. Get through that door—it's probably the rear wall of a cupboard like this one—and do you know where we'll be? Just over the Quetzal! . . . . . But I don't like the looks o' things. I don't believe this door was left open carelessly. Hartwick, you and Win stay back and watch that end. Quiet now, everybody!"

He put his ear to the door, listened a moment, then tried the latch. The door swung open. It was, as Ralph had guessed, the rear wall of a kitchen cupboard. Passing through this we found ourselves in another kitchen—the very kitchen, I realized suddenly, in which Elise Armond had died!

WE stood there a moment looking at each other and listening. There was not a sound. I remember thinking suddenly that I could not even hear the noises of the street; and I looked around to discover that the ceiling and the walls had been carefully re-lined with a sound-proof material—not to shut out noises, of course, but to keep in the sound of the radio, the dancing, and the nightly revelry.

But there was no noise in those rooms now; and, to me, that deadly silence was more alarming than if we had been greeted with a pistol-shot. I felt certain that something was wrong; and I could tell by Ralph's face that he was worried.

Two doors pierced the kitchen walls; one on our left as we stood with our backs to that cupboard, and one straight ahead. Ralph gestured for Creave and Doc Emery to take this door while he and I went to the one on our left.

A moment Ralph held an ear to the panel, then he tried the knob. The door swung open, and we stepped quietly into what I surmised had been a dining-room but which had been made over into a dance room. In one corner was an up-to-date model of radio with inside aerial. Along the walls were a few chairs. The only door was on our right. It was closed.

Ralph touched my arm and pointed to the ceiling. At first I thought he was calling my attention to that same sound-proof material; then I realized that he was pointing to a huge bowl hung close to the ceiling and which afforded indirect lighting. I had noticed, without attaching any significance to it, that the lights were burning in the kitchen. Now I saw that this might mean merely that there was no other way of lighting these rooms; or it might mean that there was some one around.

I think that same thought must have come to Ralph for we turned then to look at that one door; and, at that instant, the door began slowly opening toward us!

Ralph's .38 seemed to leap miraculously into his hand; but I stood there, motionless, staring at that slowly moving door. Presently the black barrel of a gun came into view—and then—the face of Captain Creave!

The two men grinned foolishly.

"I know just how you felt," whispered Creave. "This joint's gettin' on my nerves, too. Come an' see what we found."

We followed him out and discovered a hall running the full length of the house from front to rear. Directly across the hall from us was a door. "It's locked," whispered Creave; "but see that!" He pointed toward the rear. "Stairs! Going down!"

Ralph's eyes gleamed. "Hop down there, Dean!" he whispered. "But be careful!"

I went; and at the bottom of the stairs I learned why he had sent me. Here was a small door fastened with a spring lock. In one of the upper panels was a slide. Moving this slide back, I found a hole about half the size of a dime. And when I looked through that hole I found I was looking into one of those private booths in the Quetzal Palace!

BACK upstairs I found the three men again standing in front of that locked door. I told Ralph what I had seen. He showed no surprise, merely nodded.

"Everything was brought in that way; and that's how everybody came in. I felt pretty certain that was how it was done." He stood back and looked at the locked door. "All the other rooms are vacant. We'll have to smash in this door. Dean, slip back there and tell Hartwick to hop down and signal the bunch to knock over the Quetzal. Then—"

Ralph broke off abruptly. From down

those stairs had come the slight scraping sound of a door opening. Then voices. Swift and stealthy footsteps on the stairs. Before any of us could get out of that hall, two men hove into sight above the stair-rail; Dorman, the clerk at the Maxine; and the man we knew as "Greaseball" Mazetti.

Again Ralph's revolver leaped into his hand. Mazetti, in the lead, fell back with an astounding gasp, colliding against Dorman who took one swift look and made a dive to get back down stairs.

For a minute there was confusion as a number of things happened at once. Ralph bent quickly over the railing to grab Dorman, and Mazetti took that chance to draw an automatic. In the meantime, Creave had snapped an order to Doc Emery, and he had vanished. I was the nearest to Mazetti and before I could make a move to defend myself, the muzzle of Mazetti's automatic was against my abdomen. For a moment I went cold with grisly horror at the thought of what was to happen; but for some reason, Mazetti hesitated—and was lost. Creave's big fist struck him a smashing blow on the jaw. He went down, with Creave landing on top of him, and I turned around to find Ralph dragging the squirming Dorman over the rail and threatening to kill him if he didn't keep still.

That gave me a chance to redeem myself by a little dexterous work. In a flash I had Dorman's right wrist locked in one side of my handcuffs. With a savage jerk I yanked him over toward Mazetti, and snapped the other side on Mazetti's left wrist. At once the two men ceased struggling; but, before any of us could prevent it, Mazetti yelled something in that Spanish-Indian dialect —and it was answered from below.

"That settles it!" cried Ralph. "Dean, hop—"

"I sent Doc Emery to tell Hartwick," Creave broke in. "Wont any of that bunch get away. Sorry they've been warned not to come up these stairs! I was just gettin' a good start!"

"Link those two birds to the stair-rail and go down, if you want to," Ralph told him. "But make sure they haven't another gun. Dean, you and I'll bust in this door."

He stepped back, raised his right foot and drove his whole weight at the door. In a moment the old-fashioned lock broke, the door swung open. Ralph started in, but halted on the threshold, a dismayed cry on his lips. As I stepped toward him, he waved me back. "Get Doc Emery—and Win!" he ordered. "Quick!"

Doc Emery was returning from sending Hartwick below. I told him to hurry to Ralph, and went on for Winifred. I didn't tell her anything, didn't know what to tell her; just motioned for her to follow me, and hurried back to that room.

I'll never forget what I saw as Win and I stepped in from the hall. This room was smaller than the dance room, but at the side opposite the hall door was a small alcove. Ralph was there, bending over some one lying on a wall couch. I did not see Doc Emery at first, but discovered him when I swung the door clear back. He was kneeling on the floor beside the figure of a young girl, a pitifully frail girl with gold-red hair and a wax-white face. Winifred gasped, then uttered a cry: "Nita O'Neill!"

Doc Emery nodded. "Hasn't been dead more'n fifteen or twenty minutes. Looks like she died while sitting in this chair. Too bad! If we—"

"Come here, Win!" Ralph called.

I FOLLOWED Winifred as she crossed to the alcove. On the couch, bound, gagged, her eyes wild with terror, was Kitty Enright. With Win's help, Ralph freed her. The instant the gag was off her face she broke out in a hysterical cry, unintelligible at first but gradually becoming clearer:.

"—heard every word! And I don't blame her a bit. I'd 'a' done just what she did! I wouldn't 'a' done it that way, but I sure would—"

"Just a minute!" Ralph cut in. "Where's Juanita Rincon?"

Kitty's eyes gleamed craftily.

"Where you'll never get her, I hope! But you listen to me a minute! I know all about this! That girl"—she pointed down to the tragic figure on the floor—"that girl was madly in love with Denver Rincon. She was working for him and they were engaged. Then Juanita Flores came. Within a month she had that poor kid going to her snow parties, ruined her life, and then stole the man she loved, and got both of them hopelessly tangled up in her dope game. Nita O'Neill realized finally what had been done to her

and she planned revenge, but she waited. She wanted to hurt Juanita Flores without hurting Rincon. So—"

KITTY broke off as Captain Creave strode in. "Got 'em all without even a slapped wrist," he reported disgustedly. "Joe's herding 'em to the—" He stopped short, staring down at the girl on the floor.

"They didn't think you were going to raid this joint," Kitty said. "They got word you had landed on Rincon's place, but they didn't think you were wise to the Quetzal. I could 'a' told you about the Quetzal right off the bat, but that wasn't my business. I did enough—"

"Get back to what you were saying!" Ralph interrupted sharply. "I want to know where Juanita Flores—or Juanita Rincon—is! What has—"

"I'm telling you, aint I? When they heard that Rincon had been arrested, Juanita acted like a woman suddenly gone mad. She gets busy at once on some plot to kill Mr. Hardy. I heard her using the phone in there—"

"What phone?" demanded Ralph, as Kitty hesitated. "Where?"

Kitty bit her lip. It was plain that mention of the phone was something she had intended to conceal. "In that dressing-room," she went on, as she saw we had discovered the door. It had been completely covered with that sound-proof material and we had not observed the knob. "That's the phone I used awhile ago. But let me—"

Ralph tried the door. It was locked.

"Sure it's locked!" cried Kitty. "Didn't I tell you I saw and heard everything? As I said, Nita O'Neill was watching for a chance to revenge herself on the Flores woman without hurting Rincon. When she got word that Rincon had been arrested, she thought she'd better not wait any longer. So she plays her little game —had everything all ready, it seems. Then she locks Juanita Flores in that dressing-room and tells her through the door just what she had done. And then she tells me she's going to phone Mr. Hardy's office to send somebody here. She hurries out, then comes back and—"

"The key!" cried Ralph, snatching something off the floor.

I was looking over Ralph's shoulder as he unlocked the door of that dressing-room. What he expected to find in there I do not know; but for some reason he opened the door cautiously. I saw first, a few gowns hanging on the wall. . . . . Then the end of a dressing table came into view . . . . and across it a hand, slender, sharp-nailed, glittering with rings.

Ralph shoved the door wide.

Juanita Rincon—or Flores—was seated at her dressing table. She had leaned or fallen—forward, upsetting several things on the table. Her dark hair lay in tumbled disorder; her beautiful face was still marked by terrific emotions, of which the dominant ones were dismay, fury—and horror.

"Kitty," said Ralph, when Doc Emery and Win had gone into that dressing room, "you lied to me."

"You blame me?" flared Kitty. "I didn't want you to find her until she was—where she belongs. You see, I knew from what Nita O'Neill said through that door just what had happened. Juanita Flores never touched the stuff she got others to use; but, like a lot o' women, whenever the slightest thing upset her she'd take a couple o' headache capsules. Nita O'Neill knew that, and knew where she kept the box in her dressing table, and she had things all ready. When she decided the time had come, she emptied the box and put other capsules in it.

"Then the Flores woman, all nervous because Rincon had been pinched, goes in there and takes a couple. Right away, Nita O'Neill slams the door shut and locks it, then tells her through the door just what she's done and what's going to happen. The Flores woman beat on the door and begged and prayed and cursed —but Nita O'Neill just laughed. After she came back from phoning your office, she sits down there and tells me very quiet an' solemn-like that she has taken a couple o' the same things she put in that box and—"

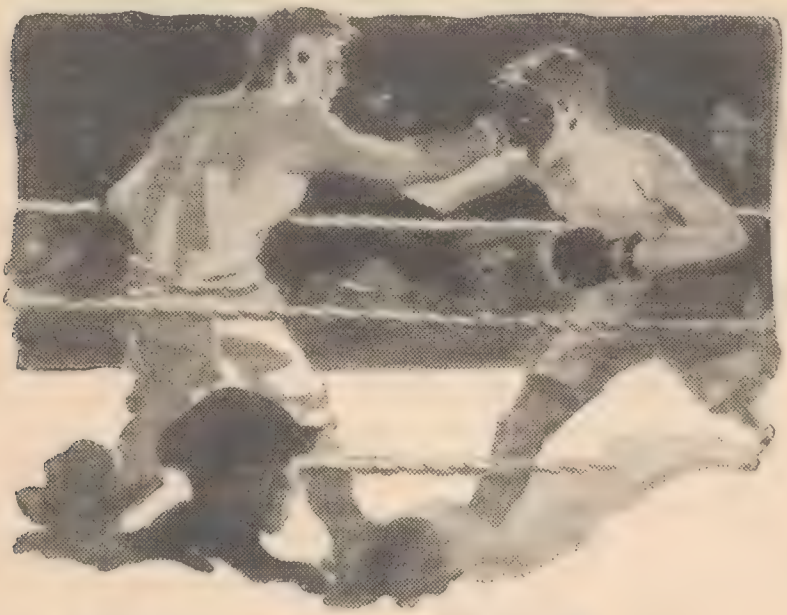
WE found eight of the capsules left in the box. Doc Emery was the first to break one and test the contents.

"Crystal cocaine," he muttered. "Damned stuff!"

"Yes," said Ralph, that far-away look in his eyes. He squeezed one of the capsules and let the shining crystals spatter on the dressing table. "Crystals —of crime!"

THE END

REAL EXPERIENCES



The Fighting Pacifist

By Ralph Brown

He was inveigled into the fight under false pretenses, but he made it a real scrap just the same.

YES sir, I am a pacifist, and I don't mean maybe!

I suppose I was "born that way." So far as I can remember, I have always been bitterly opposed both to warfare between nations and to fighting between individuals. I hold that the only time any man is justified in fighting is when a fight is forced upon him—when he cannot possibly avoid it.

I myself have participated in but one fight, and that one I assure you I could not avoid.

Early in 1916 I decided I had taught school long enough, so one day I resigned and followed Greeley's sage admonition, "Go West!"

After my arrival in Denver, however, I found opportunities very scarce. Soon I learned that many of the mining camps were experiencing a boom in tungsten. Therefore I applied at one of the near-by camps, and soon succeeded in landing a job.

I was set to work with one Buck Nelson, giant in stature, Norseman by name, but Irish by ancestry. Buck was an experienced single-jacker, and I was to learn the trade under his tutelage. Briefly defined, single-jacking consists in drilling holes in which dynamite is to be placed for blasting. The drilling is done by striking a sharpened steel bar with a heavy hammer.

Strenuous work, this, for an ex-pedagogue, soft of hand, short of wind and

flabby of muscle! Grimly, doggedly, I tried to do as much work as Buck. The effort was fruitless, to be sure, but my gameness won for me the admiration and praise of my tutor. Buck was twenty pounds heavier than I, though I was a hundred - and - eighty - pounder. Besides being an experienced single-jacker, he was in the pink of physical condition, while I, a tenderfoot, was soft and flabby from months of confinement in a stuffy schoolroom. Yes, my gameness appealed to Buck—but that very gameness brought me ultimately to grief.

ONE day in the semi-darkness of the mine I happened to step forward just as Buck, who was standing a few feet above me, swung his hammer blithely back from a terrific upward blow. I intercepted that return swing of the hammer with my chest. The blow bowled me over backward. As I righted myself, Buck asked anxiously:

"Are you much hurt, Slim?"

"Nope," I answered, "don't amount to anything at all."

Buck spat reflectively. "Don't, hey?" he repeated. "Slim, it must be a real pleasure to be able to be knocked down by a heavy hammer in the hands of a two-hundred-pound man and not feel any pain at all! I've seen a few other little things like that outá you, but this is about the biggest case of painlessness I've seen yit!"

That same evening Buck called me into the bunk-house. "Here," he commanded, "put these on." And he tossed me a pair of boxing-gloves.

"S-a-say," I sputtered, "I don't want these things! Don't know how to use 'em. You see, I—"

"Sure, sure," he answered soothingly, as he laid a huge hand caressingly upon my shoulder. "I understand, Slim. You're opposed to fightin' an' all rough stuff. Well, I sure respect you for that.

"Now, here's the proposition: I'm gonna train for a fight, an' I can't afford to hire no regular trainer. See? So I'm wantin' you to act as my trainer an' my sparrin' partner.

"Slim, if you knowed all the circumstances you wouldn't blame me a bit. Fact is, you'd praise me; you'd help me out all you could. You see, this bird I'm gonna fight needs to be licked. Somebody's gotta lick him!"

Eventually he convinced me. I never did fully understand the noble cause that impelled Buck to battle. It seemed to be a most worthy cause, indeed—some elevating, ennobling purpose! All this sudden righteousness was baffling to me, for in Buck's previous battles he seemed, judging by his own narratives, to have been actuated by motives of—well, the least said about those motives the better!

But I was eventually convinced, as I have said, and we entered upon the serious business of training. Each night we battered each other about the bunk-house. What we lacked in skill we made up in energy.

Buck had never fought a regular, formal, Marquis of Queensberry bout, but he had starred in many an irregular, informal, knock-down-and-drag-out fight. Hence, he was not a totally inexperienced gladiator. Apparently, he had nothing to fear from the coming clash.

His opponent, alliteratively known as Rough-house Ryan, was, like Buck himself, a miner, much more accustomed to rough-and-tumble scraps with other miners than to polite affairs within the roped arena.

There was an ugly rumor afloat that Ryan had always shown excellent judgment in his selection of adversaries, his usual method being to force a fight upon a man smaller and evidently less powerful than himself. Even in the few formal bouts in which he had engaged he had been pitted, by chance or otherwise, against men who might be judged, even at a casual glance, to be greatly inferior to him in pugilistic ability.

As might be expected under these circumstances, Ryan's fistic career had been thus far an unbroken series of triumphs. It was the earnest hope of Buck and his backers that in the coming contest Rough-house Ryan would receive what he was accustomed to giving.

BUCK trained faithfully and strenuously. Gradually he increased both in speed and in endurance. So did I—if I hadn't he'd have killed me! He expressed himself as delighted with my services. He often said that I could whip Ryan, whether he could or not.

But I regarded such statements as so much applesauce, intended to counteract my dislike of the game—a dislike that steadily increased.

The battle was to be fought on Memorial Day. The arena was a huge old frame building on the outskirts of a small mining town. The affair was to be conducted without the knowledge or consent of the officers of the law; legal red tape was an institution to be avoided.

As the great day drew near, both Buck and I found ourselves in truly excellent form. Each was fast and shifty of foot, each a marvel at enduring punishment. This latter quality in me elicited from Buck the most grandiloquent praise. "Slim," he often declared, "they can't no man lick you—Ryan nor nobody else! I know they can't, for I found out long ago I couldn't hurt you, even with a hammer!"

MEMORIAL DAY came at last. With it came to me for the first time the knowledge that I—not Buck—was to battle with Rough-house Ryan! Of course, I see now that I might have suspected it—indeed should have suspected it long before, but— Well, anyhow, I never *had* suspected it, not even when it was decreed that I should wear my fighting clothes to the ringside.

In fact, it was not until I was in the ring that I realized the truth! Then, when an angry protest rose to my lips, Buck silenced it with a nonchalant, "You've got nothin' to fear, Slim. Anyway, you couldn't get out of it now if you tried!"

Unquestionably, this statement was true—too late, now! Incurable pacifist that I was, I must fight!

In a daze I heard myself introduced as "Slim Sullivan." In a daze I shook hands with a great hulking brute designated as Rough-house Ryan.

Ryan effectually ended that daze with a sizzling uppercut. I came out of my trance and returned the playful compliment. The fight was on!

I do not remember clearly anything that followed. I believe the fight must have been very primitive. I have a confused recollection of facing Ryan round after round; of being knocked down time after time, and of seeing Ryan go down a number of times; of intervals in my corner, with Buck, acting now as my second, hilariously optimistic as to the outcome and vociferously praising me.

I suppose it must have been the psychological effect of Buck's suggestive counsel that won the battle for me. Time and again in the course of the fray he shouted to me: "He can't hurt you, Slim! Hell, I've tried to hurt you with a hammer, an' never could!"

THE end came in the eighth round. In an exchange of fistic pleasantries Ryan was hurled bodily through the ropes, to land sprawling in the crowds at the ringside.

He fell within just a few feet of one wall of the building. In that wall was a loose board. One leap brought Ryan to the board, one kick removed it from his path. Through the aperture thus formed, Ryan took flight.

In a tumult of applause, I was proclaimed the victor. Then came congratulations. Raucous shouts from leather lungs. Bone-crushing handshakes. Slaps upon the back but little less vigorous than Ryan's own pile-driver blows. Drinks.

I am by nature a prohibitionist, as I am by nature a pacifist. There had been no escape from battle; there was now no escape from booze. Fortunately for me, oblivion came soon.

I awoke in a comfortable bed, the faithful Buck watching over me. Rapturously he rejoiced in my speedy recovery. Loudly he praised my recent exploit. In glowing words he predicted for me a glorious career in pugilism. I assured him that I agreed with him perfectly; I acquiesced in his plans for hiring a professional trainer.

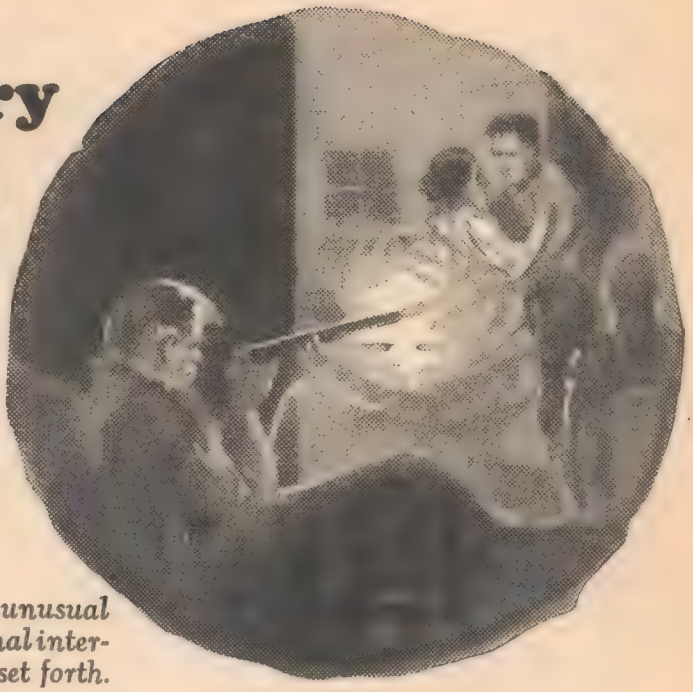
But you've probably guessed that I was lying to Buck—as shamelessly as he had previously lied to me. For in my secret soul was the old abhorrence of violence, grown even stronger than before. My first fight should be my last; a pacifist I was born, and a pacifist I should die!

A FEW days later, suitcase in hand, I stepped into the rear of an automobile. The car moved rapidly away. No one but the driver saw me and he alone knew my destination. Not even he knew what later became of me. As truly as Ryan ran away from defeat, I ran away from victory.

In this narrative I have purposely been inaccurate as to names. I shall never go back to that place. I was tricked into that fight—the only one of my mature life. I could not avoid it. If I can possibly avoid it I shall never fight again.

Yes sir, I am a pacifist, and I don't mean maybe!

A Mystery of the North



By

Charles E. Butler

A human document of unusual character and exceptional interest, straightforwardly set forth.

WE rode into Medicine Hat after the fall round-up on the Ironsides, the cook of the chuck wagon and I, both with our pay checks in our jeans. After the usual clean-up at the barber-shop, and some grub at the Chink's, we started to look for trouble, and found all we wanted. There were four in the game. In the morning there were two dead broke! Ole Anderson, the cook, was one of these and I was the other.

I was feeling pretty sore with myself and blamed the brand of hard stuff we had filled up on. Ole said it wasn't the liquid fire we drank, but those tinhorn gamblers had staked the game on us. We decided to hunt them up and either get our money or take it out of their hide, but upon riding the town over and around, we found no signs of them. Evidently they had hit out at once in case of a comeback. Ole said nothing, but I said a few things—for we were both broke and winter before us.

We rode slowly to the corral and unsaddled our cayuses, without a word out of Ole. At last I could stand it no longer.

"Ole, you bum pancake-slinger, what are we going to do now?" I asked.

Ole slowly delivered himself of this piece of wisdom: "I think I find myself a job."

I left him and struck out for the hotel, better known as the "Orphans' Home," and sat there, wondering whether I should make a break for the south, into the United States, or go west, where at least it was warmer.

The hotel was getting pretty noisy about this time, for a big outfit of horse-wranglers had just pulled in from Montana, and this being their first town for some days, they were liquoring up pretty good. As I was not feeling like any more of Tim Mooney's fire, I started to make for the door, when whom should I run into but Ole the cook, with his blankets and other dunnage on his back, just coming in.

"Hello, Ole," said I. "Where to now—New York, or Norway?"

"Oh," said he, "I find myself a job."

"Where?" asked I.

"I cook for this gentleman here, to Winnipeg." He showed me a man standing at the bar, who, when he saw Ole, called for him to drink, and said for him to bring his friend. Ole introduced us, and after a few moments of chat, he offered me a job to help take a bunch of broncos clear through to Winnipeg. He said he expected to get them down there, halter-break them, and have them ready for the rush of immigrants that would come early in the spring. His outfit had

driven the broncos from the United States side, and as some of the men wanted to get back, he was looking for good riders.

SO I joined up with him, and after a good night's rest, we left in the early morning with a band of the worst-looking lot of outlaws I had seen for some time. However, after a long, cold and weary ride, we landed the broncos in the Winnipeg stockyards during a blinding snowstorm. Refusing to stay to the performance of halter-breaking in the winter, I took my pay, and as Ole's services were no longer needed, he was paid off too. So there we were again, both foot-loose!

We decided to find a place to dump our dunnage, and then try and look this burg over. We sampled everything from black-jack to craps, and after a lively week, we were both again on the "rocks."

One morning as we lounged up Main Street, Ole remarked, "Well, I guess I find myself a job."

We passed an employment office on the outside of which was written in chalk, "Cook Wanted for Lumber Camp." "Teamsters Wanted," was also chalked up.

"There's a job for me," said Ole, and we walked in. He was soon hired as cook, and I as a teamster. We were to leave the next morning on the train for Brandon, and would then be supplied with sleighs and horses. Transportation on the train was free. After settling for our board and room, we were flat broke again. In the morning we got our transportation from a guy in the depot, and left for Brandon, where we were to report to the Christer Lumber Mills. Here, after a lot of talk, we were told to hitch up two outfits and load up with all kinds of truck. The foreman then told us to hit the Assiniboine River, going west till we struck the forks of the Little Saskatchewan River going north, and to follow it until we came to the logging camp on Lake Odie, into which the Little Saskatchewan runs.

WE made Rapid City all right, and then our trouble began, for as we left in the early dawn it started to snow, and by noon there was a first-class blizzard blowing, but as the trail we followed was on the ice between the banks of the river, we could not very well get lost, and kept pushing along, hoping to hit the camp before dark. We were now in between heavy timber on both sides of the narrow river, and did not feel the storm quite so badly, but with darkness coming on very suddenly, as it does in this Northern latitude, Ole said we should draw the team under the lee of the bank, unhitch and make a tent with our blankets. As there was lots of wood for fire, we could make out all right, but I did not relish being out all night, so I said we would go on a little farther for we might be close upon the camp. So we pushed on for about another hour when upon turning a sharp bend on the river, we saw a light moving forward and backward. The horses traveled very slowly, so Ole ran on ahead, and I followed with the outfit, keeping the light in view. Suddenly I noticed it stood still, and then disappeared. I whipped up the horses, and in about twenty yards overtook Ole—and if my eyes did not deceive me, a woman! What was still more surprising, Ole was holding her tight in his arms.

The woman seemed to be sobbing and talking at the same time. Upon seeing me she drew herself away from him, and stooping down, picked up a pail of water, which she had evidently filled from a hole in the river's ice, and with a word or two in Norwegian to Ole, she started up the bank ahead of us.

Ole picked up the lantern, and after lighting it we unhitched the horses. Then, as he said there was shelter for them, we both followed the woman through the brush until we came to a clearing in the timber with a light shining from the window of a small shack. There were a few rough outbuildings. Here we put the teams in and fixed them up for the night, while Ole, deeming some explanation necessary, said the woman was married and that her husband was very sick in bed; he added that he had known them in the Old Country.

We entered the shack, which although rough outside, was warm and comfortable inside. As we came in, Ole said something in Norwegian which the woman answered in English, and I then saw that she was young, strong and well-built, with the fair hair of the North, and a pleasant, smiling face. She made us supper, and afterward, being tired, we were very glad to rest.

As there were only two small rooms, or rather one big room, divided by a heavy dyed canvas, I laid down on a bunk built at the side of the wall. I could hear a

man coughing frequently. It seemed as though the woman would then administer something which would ease the cough. At last she came out and called Ole, and they both entered the room behind the curtain where the man lay. It seemed that they talked there for a long time. Finally I fell asleep.

When I awoke it was dawn. There was a terrific wind and snowstorm, which meant that we must stay with these people another day. However, Ole did not seem to mind, and the young woman said she was glad some one was with her, for she thought that her husband was dying. I asked to see him. She said that was kind of me and took me to the bedside of a big-framed man, evidently of the same nationality as Ole and the woman, and in the last stages of tuberculosis. He spoke very little English, and did not seem to wish to talk, but when he looked at the woman, and then at the entrance of the door where Ole stood, I was startled at the tremendous hatred that shone out from those brilliant, yet feverish, sunken eyes. If ever a man showed murderous thoughts through his eyes, that man did, and the thought came to me that it was a good thing for Ole the man was not long for this world—or my friend Ole would soon be looking for a job in the next world!

Leaving the sick man with his wife, after a few comforting words, I passed out into the other room, and after a while went to attend my horses, cursing my luck that I should be held up in such a place as this. One thing I did not like was the increasing interest in each other displayed between Ole and the young woman. Still, it was no business of mine, and as we were leaving soon, I thought I would not interfere.

ABOUT twelve o'clock that night the woman called to us, "Come!" and as she said her husband was much worse, I took a look at him and could see he was sinking fast. I told her she had better ask him if he had anything he wished to say. He did not answer, but his eyes continually roved from the rifle hanging upon the wall within reach of his hand, and the curtain that divided the room—all there was between him and Ole.

I made an excuse to leave, for as it was very hot in the cabin I thought I would refresh myself by a few breaths of fresh air. I had not been gone more than two minutes, when I heard my name called from the door by Ole who cried: "Come quick!"

As I hurried in, I found the woman crying, and Ole more excited than I had ever before seen him. He said that the man had just died.

I glanced at the body and then covered it with a sheet. As Ole was offering all the sympathy that seemed necessary, I sat down close to the curtain that divided the room.

The light was burning in the room in which the body was lying. I could see the bed and the body covered with the white sheet. Several times I was prompted to pull the curtain closer together so that I could not see the body lying there. I rose and moved my stool, but no matter where I sat, my eyes seemed always to be focused upon the corpse.

At last I must have dozed slightly, for I awakened with a start. Probably the movements of the others in the room had caused this—certainly Ole and the woman had moved, for they were standing in the middle of the room reading from a bunch of letters, right in front of the curtain, so that had the man upon the bed been living, he could easily have seen them. Ole had his arms around the woman and they were reading and talking alternately in a language unintelligible to me.

Again my eyes strayed repeatedly to the man upon the bed, until I became nervous, for it seemed I could see the corpse move. I looked away and rubbed my eyes with a curse at myself for being such a fool. At last I felt sure that one hand, lying out from under the sheet, had moved. It was the hand nearest the rifle. Then I watched closely, and actually saw the hand nearest the gun move slowly. Then the other hand raised up and removed the sheet from off the face and before I, stupefied, could move or utter one word, the man placed the rifle to his shoulder and fired!

The woman had her back to the curtain, but Ole was facing the man when the gun was discharged. The bullet passed clear through the woman's heart, but was deflected in some way and passed into the right shoulder of Ole. Both of them dropped to the floor. Sense then coming to me, I made a jump through the curtain—but it was too late; the man was indeed dead, this time. He had turned the rifle upon himself, and placing it to his mouth, had blown his head off.

Ole was still breathing, however. I lifted him upon the bunk and stanched the flow of blood as much as possible, built up the fire and put water near him. Then I made for the barn and mounting a horse, struck out up the river's trail to find the camp. After a terribly cold ride, I succeeded in finding it, and soon returned with four or five men to the shack.

There was nothing else we could do for the dead, so we buried them in the same grave, where they were closer together, perhaps, than they had ever been before. Fixing up a sleigh and light horses, we took Ole over the ice as fast as the horses could travel, landing him in Rapid City more dead than alive. The doctor quickly dressed his wound and got him to bed.

WHEN I called on Ole a couple of days later, he told me the story. They had come from the same town in Norway. The dead man was a mail-carrier, who brought the mail over the fjord to the mountain village where they lived.

Both men had loved the woman, but Ole won her, and as they were very poor, he decided to come to Canada, and make enough money to send for his sweetheart. This he did, but he never heard from her. He sent the passage-money and wrote several letters.

Probably she wrote him, too—who knows? He was going from place to place, always at work, never idle, while she was concealing her heartache and thinking Ole had forgotten her, for she never received the money nor the letters.

The dead man had stolen them from the mail and opened them; then when poverty was sore upon her, he succeeded in gaining her consent to marriage with him, and after a year they left for Canada, on Ole's passage-money.

He, fearing to meet Ole, had always worked well away from towns where Ole might be, and at last started away to the wilderness to trap furs when the disease from which he had long been a sufferer, overtook him. The rest you know.

I stayed with Ole until he recovered. He was a silent man always, and was never the kind to complain. However, there is no doubt but that he had loved his sweetheart very dearly.

"Well," said I, one day, "funds are low, Ole. What shall we do?"

"Well," said he, "I think I find myself a job." Which he did.

Stand To!

By

Bert Travis

HOWEVER meaningless these words may sound to some, to the millions of men in uniform on the battlefields of Europe during the war, they held a vivid meaning, for they meant to stand ready for action at a moment's notice.

It was a cool, dull, gloomy-looking morning on the eighth day of August, 1918. We were on the outskirts of Amiens, where our battalion had spent the previous night in shell-holes, or what was left of the trenches.

At five minutes before the "zero hour" the order "Stand to!" was passed down the line. We all knew it was coming, and were naturally keyed up to a high pitch, knowing that this was the beginning of a great offensive drive in that sector.

I remarked to my "buddy" of the last six months in the front line: "Well, Wilkie, I've a feeling that this is the last scrap I'm going to be in." Then, tying a handkerchief around my left thigh I added:

"And that's right where I'm going to get it. Then good-by France—England or West for me!"

That five minutes' wait had seemed an hour, when suddenly, with an indescribable roar, every type of field-artillery imaginable barked and spit their missiles of death. The artillery was stationed hub to hub, in lines stretching for miles directly back of us, so that we could hear nothing but the roar of the guns and the heavy shells flying over us, with streams of machine-gun bullets from the brigade

A flame-vivid cross-section of the Great War as seen by the men who fought it is recorded in this unadorned chronicle.

guns filling in the vacant spaces. It was the most terrific bombardment any of us had ever heard (and we had heard some before) but as we were not on the receiving end of it this time, we had little to fear.

THIS "show" kept up all day, while we pushed ahead in waves about fifty feet apart. After going ahead all morning I began to think that the attack was not so bad after all, for we had seen nothing of the enemy and I had had no occasion to use my gun. I began to tire under the strain of the load I was carrying—rifle, machine-gun and ammunition.

At one o'clock we rested a few minutes, which gave me a chance to eat a little hardtack and "bully beef" and loosen my equipment to rest my shoulders. Then we were on our way again, but were now on ground which must have been "no-man's land" earlier in the war, for we were now stepping over bodies of the enemy forces, bodies that had been lying there for some time—probably shot in some retreat and with no chance to be buried. It was a ghastly sight, and the shivers ran down my back when I reflected I too might be soon found that way.

All afternoon we walked ahead, with nothing especially exciting happening. The cannons were still roaring and airplanes maneuvering overhead. The dead and wounded were becoming more numerous, showing that our artillery fire was effective. The enemy machine-guns were active, but their artillery had no chance to retaliate, being forced to retreat as quickly as possible to avoid capture. Nevertheless we did see a number of field-pieces with ammunition, which they had failed to rescue. On one occasion my buddy and I turned one of these guns around, and after some investigation managed to fire one shot; but as we didn't know the range we stopped for fear we might be firing on our own men.

About five o'clock we came to a wide, sunken road, about a mile long, cut through a slight rise in the ground, and this acted as a natural trench—the first real protection we had had that day. Much to our relief, the order to halt was given, so here we stopped for the night. Soon the whole battalion of six hundred men closed in, so we were once more together.

The company cooks began to hustle our food—thick pea soup, corned-beef hash, bread and tea. By the time I had that under my belt I felt like a new man, and leaning up against the side of the little embankment I smoked a cigarette and rested.

SUDDENLY I heard a faint purr of airplane motors, and saw in the distance about one hundred and fifty to two hundred planes, flying in small groups from back of our lines. Soon they passed over us with a roar, and in a few minutes we could hear the *boom! boom! boom!* of hundreds of bombs as they were dropped in the distance, and could see many black puffs of smoke high in the air as the anti-aircraft guns opened on our flyers.

How many they brought down I never knew, but they certainly had plenty to shoot at.

The men of the other battalion who had borne the brunt of the attack all day were now retiring to the rear, and from the remarks they made while passing through our lines, they seemed happy to be relieved. Although I "kidded" with some of them, I realized that the next day would probably thin our own ranks as it had theirs, and not being a natural-born "hero" I must confess that my sleep that night was light.

AN hour before daylight on the ninth, we were ordered to take up our positions in a patch of woods about a thousand feet from where we were, and to proceed there in single file and very quietly, for now we were close to the enemy lines.

Shortly before it came my turn to leave the shelter of the sunken road, the bullets started to sing over the top of the embankment. But the fear of being shot (which I am inclined to think is held by more men than would care to admit it) is as nothing compared with the fear of being called a quitter. So up the bank and over the top I went with the rest, though I felt as though my hair was standing straight up and pushing my helmet off. It didn't take me five minutes to cover the space between the road and the wood. I got across safely, though quite a number of the others didn't.

Wilkie and I sat down behind a large tree and had our breakfast of cheese, hardtack and water, after which we smoked cigarettes and occupied ourselves by counting the bullets that hit the trees around us. Soon the artillery started, and heavy shells began dropping from above. We lost several men, killed or wounded during the two hours or so of this bombardment; then it ceased and once more we could breathe easily.

About eleven-thirty A. M. I saw our major and a sergeant coming through the woods and stopping to speak to each group of men behind the trees and shacks. Reaching us, they said: "At twelve-thirty sharp we are making an attack; get your machine-guns ready."

At twelve-thirty the signal to advance was given, and out into the open we went, about six hundred strong, and in waves as before. Wilkie and I were in the fifth wave, and did not leave till the first wave was some two hundred feet ahead. In a few minutes it seemed as if the world had come to an end, for the enemy had been merely waiting for our move; now they opened up on us with everything they possessed. Machine-gun bullets and shells were dropping around us like rain, and many of our men were falling.

I stumbled and fell, and before rising again I emptied one "pan" of ammunition into the woods ahead. Though I could see no one, I knew they were there. A bullet struck the bayonet on my rifle which hung over my shoulder, snapping it in two; another went into the canister of my gas mask, which was tied around my chest, and before I got up a heavy shell landed and exploded not more than fifteen feet away. The concussion lifted me up, then dropped me, just about knocking out what little wind I had left. For a while I didn't know whether I was hit or not, though covered with blood and dirt. However, the fact that I was so close to the shell, and lying down, saved me that time, as the shrapnel does not strike low for a radius of twenty or thirty feet from the spot where the shell lands. Another shell landed a short distance in front of me, and had it not been a "dud" I would not be here now.

ONCE more I started off, though I seemed to be in a daze. Bullets were striking all round, though none hit me, and soon we came to a railroad track, where I found a bunch of our men taking shelter in a ditch alongside the track. Out of a battalion six hundred strong, not more than seventy-five survived. Due to some error in orders, the attack had been made too soon. It should have been delayed until the artillery could cover our advance.

After a while the firing stopped, and seeing some men walking across the open space on our right without drawing fire, we concluded that the enemy had retired from their position in the woods. Three of us started for the woods, and reached them without having a single shot fired at us.

Upon entering these woods, we could see no one around, till we came to a long, low shack with windows along the side. Through these windows we could see the forms of many men—how many we could

not tell—and my heart almost stopped beating, for what could three of us do with a crowd like that? I rested my Lewis gun on my arm and yelled for them to come out. There was no answer, so, crouching behind a tree, I fired one pan (thirty-seven rounds) of ammunition just above the windows, with a sweeping motion. Then out they came, with their hands reaching for the sky. Some of them were very young, and crying from the wounds they had received.

So surprised were we at the ease with which they gave up that we hardly knew what to do next. By this time about thirty of our own men had come up, but even then, had our captives wished to fight it out they could probably have licked us, as there were about one hundred and fifty of them.

We sent the prisoners back, disarmed, and unescorted, to our rear, and I thought for the moment that was all there was to do. But just then I came to a tree with a ladder nailed to it, and looking up, saw one of the enemy sniping from a high platform, apparently unaware that his friends below had surrendered. I called to him to come down, but he either could not understand or paid no attention.

There was only one thing to do—which we did, to save others.

Next we entered another long shack which had been used as a barn, and investigated every manger. We found only one boy, about fifteen years old, hiding. When he saw us he offered us everything he had, and was almost too scared to talk. Going out the rear door I almost fell over a machine-gunner, sitting beside his gun and ready to fire. His back was toward me. Before he had time to think I struck him a blow with my rifle-stock, knocking him over, and grabbing the pistol lying beside him, I made him unstrap his belt and holster; then back he went to follow the rest of them.

This entire "show" lasted only a very short time, but will live forever in my memory. Finally we left that place, just thirty or forty strong, and once more in the open, went ahead with nothing to hinder us. I took the opportunity to fill my gun magazines and smoke a cigarette.

WE now found ourselves in a fresh-cut wheat-field, with the wheat in shocks ready to haul in. Suddenly from about two thousand yards in the distance, it seemed to us as if the whole German Army rose up out of the ground, having been concealed in a blind trench in which they had waited for us, and proceeded to counter-attack.

We were greatly outnumbered, and there was no alternative but to turn and retreat, stopping only to fire a volley. Stooping down behind one of the wheat shocks I rested my gun on the top. I fired one magazine and was halfway through the next when I felt what seemed like a blow from a heavy hammer on my left thigh near the hip. It knocked me over, and on sitting up I found blood gushing out. I ripped my field dressing from my coat, and with the help of a buddy, the wound was bandaged up. But I now found that the shot had paralyzed my left side and I could not move.

HOWEVER, at this critical moment (I know this sounds like a story, but it is a fact—it *was* at this critical moment) assistance came in the form of a squadron of whippet tanks, firing their one-pounders and machine-guns; and almost at the same time a detachment of our cavalry came up on the right. My relief was of short duration, for the tanks were coming directly toward me and I knew they could not see me lying down. So raising myself on one elbow I waved my helmet as high as I could, and was overjoyed to see the tanks turn aside from where I lay. They passed on, and I "passed out" until about three o'clock the next morning, when I was aroused by some one trying to pour a drink down my throat. My rescuers proved to be two Australians. They picked me up and carried me back until they found some stretcher-bearers, who in turn carried me to a field dressing-station, where my wounds were washed and I was put into an ambulance and taken to a base hospital.

Three days later I found myself in a hospital just outside of London, and on April 3, 1919, I was once more back home in St. Paul, Minnesota, with my mother, sisters and brothers, and the friends I had left behind. The joy of returning and the welcome I received made me almost forget the hardships I had suffered, and though I would not care to have another similar experience, I believe I can honestly say that I'm glad I went that time!

By

Emerson Smith

The business or profession of the forest ranger has all-too-exciting hours—as witness this remarkable story.

Exploding Justice

FIFTY-FIVE tramps stumbled out of the two dimly lit coaches which the wheezing little narrow-gauge locomotive had brought into Bailey's at two o'clock of the mountain morning. In the chill of the early June air they shivered and rasped profanity.

"Who's the boss here?" came a husky voice.

The conductor, with his lantern on his arm, handed me a long wax-sealed yellow envelope.

"Sign this receipt," he said. "I guess you don't need to count it; you see, it's sealed. Three hundred'n fifty dollars."

He shoved his indelible pencil in my fingers, obviously in a hurry to begin the three-hour run back to Denver.

"You the boss?" The husky voice was at my ear. I signed the leaf in the conductor's order-book and turned. A burly fellow, dirty-faced, with a stubble of reddish beard and small eyes, mere gleaming slits in the lantern-light, watched me put the bulky envelope in an inner pocket of my coat. "Say, bo, when do we feed?"

"Not now. Come on, men, pick up your stuff and follow me," I called.

"Aw, feller, listen. These bums aint been eatin' regular. Yuh gotta eat before yuh kin work," the voice whined.

"You'll eat when we get to the fire." I turned my back. "Get a move on, boys."

As disreputable-looking a crew as ever polluted the clean, fragrant air of the high hills surlily shouldered rope-tied bundles and battered suitcases and climbed aboard the wagons already loaded with blankets, axes, shovels and hoes.

My baptism in flame-fighting had come almost immediately after I had been taken on for the summer as a fire-guard in the Pike National Forest in Colorado. A suspiciously stationary black cloud the morning before had led me to a high ridge from where I looked down on a raging fire leaping with terrifying swiftness up the sides of Black Mountain.

To reach the nearest telephone my black mare and I had to descend toward that seething inferno. Leading her down the precipitous side of the great ridge through almost impassable fields of boulders and loose rock and detouring around fallen timber took time and when we reached a ravine leading to Elk Creek, the roar of the flames was deafening. The brook was steaming, a ceiling of flame was above us and falling brands had blistered the horse and ruined my forest-service uniform when we raced out into the open and wallowed in cool Elk Creek.

The sun was low when at Litsey's ranch I telephoned to the forest supervisor at Denver.

"Bad luck!" exclaimed Fitzgerald. "Every ranger and every man of experience in the office here is fighting two big fires, one on Pike's Peak and the other on the Argentine. You'll have to go this alone."

His tired voice directed me to go to the village of Bailey's in Platte Cañon, the nearest railroad point, buy food, bedding and implements from the general store, and hire wagons to transport the half hundred or more men he would pick up that evening on the streets and in lodging-houses. These he would rush to me by special train.

As it was a "crown fire,"—the most rapid of fires since it sweeps through the upper branches,—the supervisor instructed me to purchase dynamite to blast through the thick timber fire-lines, with the hope that these wide cleared spaces would halt the red hurricane. He concluded:

"Charge to the Government everything possible; but I don't want you to be crippled for lack of funds, so I'll send you money by the conductor of the train."

SO now here we were, in five heavy farm wagons jolting twenty-odd miles over rough hilly roads, our destination marked by a far-spread yellow glow on the black curtain of the night. I carried the heavy bundle of dynamite, each stick carefully wrapped by the storekeeper. He had attached the fuses at my request and, cautioning me that it was all ready for use, repeated his warning:

"This stuff's so durn' treacherous, better hide it where no one can step on it or throw a match down where it can reach a fuse. You'd better carry it yourself in the wagon, jest like you'd hold a sleeping baby."

It was a magnificently terrible spectacle, that fire! Dying down in the night, the sun had started it, with the assistance of a light wind, into a flaming, roaring, exploding, upward-sweeping avalanche of fire under a swirling canopy of crimson-streaked smoke. The men were divided into companies and we fought it on the spreading sides and in front. Husky Voice —I must call him that, for I never knew his name—seemed tireless, and his splendid strength in felling trees and in shoveling won my gratitude, despite the aversion I had felt when he accosted me at Bailey's.

AFTER three days and nights—for we worked in shifts during the nightly respite from the killing heat, extinguishing blazing stumps, branches, smoldering humus and clearing new fire-lines by felling trees with the axes and dynamite—we believed the end was in sight. And then, as the fourth day came in hot and still, it broke out of bounds at the northwest and began racing toward the beautiful thick forest of hundred-foot Engelmann spruce that grew on the ridges leading up to kingly Mount Evans.

I shouted for ten of the tired men, lounging off-duty, to come with me and started, carrying the last three sticks of dynamite and two axes.

Husky Voice joined me halfway up the slope I was climbing as the quickest route to intercept the fresh flames. He was carrying shovels, axes, and over one shoulder his ragged coat formed a bulging bundle. He was alone. To my question as to where were the others, he jerked his head backward.

We climbed to a point where the flames could be checked before they ignited the spruce, if back-fires were started in the dense jack-pine growing below the rim of a deep, narrow gulch. A disused trail led us to a clearing where a promising outcropping years before had lured a prospector to dig and blast. On a gentle slope above the wide prospect-hole stood the miner's log cabin. Snow lay in patches under the trees and half filled the hole that represented so much fruitless labor.

I gave Husky Voice orders to go down and start the back-fires.

"It's coming right this way, up that draw." I had to raise my voice, for the roar was growing louder momentarily. "Run, man, run—and I'll send the other boys to help you!"

He grinned.

"What're yuh goin' to do?"

"Clear the pine here. If your back-fires don't get started in time, and this timber is standing for the big fire to feed on, it will have strength to leap across the gulch here—and then it's good-by to the Engelmann! Don't stand there gawping—get busy!"

"But it's time to eat. I'm hungry, kid, I'm tellin' yuh!"

With that Niagara roar and the smoke-darkened sky, I lost my temper. In the midst of my high-powered remarks Husky Voice pushed in the sagging door of the

cabin and placed his coat on the floor. He plunged into the jack-pine. There was no sign of the other men.

The cabin would be a safe place to store the dynamite, I reflected. So in the oven of the rusty iron stove I placed the three sticks. Wide cracks which showed down the firebox would permit coals to fall through into the oven, but as there was no likelihood of any one building a fire I carefully closed the door on the explosives with the comforting thought that when the men did arrive there was no chance of them stumbling on it.

HUSKY VOICE did his work well. The humus, dry and thick, ignited in a fierce fire the jack-pine and we were aided by a wind that shifted the direction of the main fire. When it turned, it encountered the cleared spaces I made on the west side of the draw.

Twilight came and we had won. So weary I could scarcely put one foot before the other, Husky Voice and I made our way to the cabin.

"Whatever happened to those men?" I speculated.

"What'd yuh say, kid, if I tole yuh I'd turned 'em back on the boss' orders?"

"You're joking," I replied.

As the words left my lips, I spun around. The axes and hoe fell to the ground. Husky Voice had his hand in my coat-collar, twisting it and shaking me.

"Give me that dough, an' I'll not hurt yuh, see? Yuh kin square yourself, all right. Hand it over, kid!"

My astonishment, the incredulity reflected on my face, I presume, reassured him, for he removed his stranglehold and grinned at me.

"The fire's out, see? Uncle Sam'll pay the men off. Yuh jest lost it natural up here, see? I'm going down the other side of the mountain—vamoose. I like yuh, bo; you're a fine little feller an' I don't want tuh hurt yuh.

"Three dollars a day an' grub, all we could eat, they said. Huh! I'll tell the world I earned it, an' twenty times over! An' grub? Aint had enough to eat no time, an' fightin' like I been—why, kid, I've earnt that money yuh got from the Gov'mint, over an' over! An' on a empty stummick."

"I'm starved, too," I said, a dog-tired brain fighting for time to reason what to do. "But we've got nothing to eat up here. You can't make your get-away—you'd starve to death in these mountains."

"Aw, what yuh take me fer?" he grinned. "I figgered this all out when I see the trainman hand yuh that dough! Use yer thinker, bo, use yer thinker. What I got in my coat but grub, huh? Yuh lose that long green up here an' yuh lose me, too! Burned up, yuh kin tell 'em, and start searchin'. Lets both of us out!"

I thought I saw my chance and sprang for the ax, but Husky Voice caught me squarely under the chin, and as I went down there was another and more crushing impact on the side of my head. . . . .

I came to, looking at a tremulous star, wavering through the wispy veil of smoke that still shrouded the mountains. My head ached terrifically as I tried to regain my feet. I steadied myself against a tree; the world stopped spinning after a while and I became aware of two facts: smoke was coming out of the cabin chimney and one of the paneless windows was a flickering yellow square.

Edging closer I saw Husky Voice, in the light of a pitch-pine knot, cooking at the stove. The blessed aroma of boiling coffee came to me, with the fragrance of pork and beans.

I was debating just what to do when the explosion came.

Without an instant's warning, without even a sputter, the silence was shattered by a dull roar that echoed and echoed. The front of that rickety cabin came out in a shower of logs and with it tin cans, pieces of stove and a bulky figure rolling like a ball down the slope.

After a long and fearful interval in which I admit I stood shaking, I found him laid neatly in the snow in the prospect-hole.

What was left of the cabin was by this time burning fiercely; by the light of the flames I went through the faintly breathing Husky Voice, recovered my envelope with the bills intact, my watch, knife and other possessions.

NEXT morning early when we went up to the ridge on a checking-up patrol, one of the men pointed to the deep impression left by a wallowing body in the cinder-spotted, dirty snow in the prospect-hole.

"Looks like a wild animal's been coolin' off from the fire," he said.

But of Husky Voice there was no trace.

This adventure of a fat man and a bandit wasn't so funny at the time, but afterward he saw the joke.

That Girl!

By

M. Boucher

IF it had not been for that girl I would have missed the worst of a bad half-hour, and yet this story would not be a story without her part in it.

I am a builder of bungalows in a western city and am interested in all new real-estate subdivisions; so when I read advertisements of the opening on a certain Sunday of a new one some distance out of town, I resolved to kill two birds with one stone—take the aforementioned girl for a spin in the old roadster on the Saturday night preceding the advertised opening, and give the property the "once-over" at the same time. She was agreeable to the idea and we gayly drove over the well-paved roads to the top of the hill overlooking the subdivision.

Here I stopped the car, and we sat looking over the land. We had been sitting thus for about a minute when suddenly a flashlight was turned directly into the seat of our roadster and a sort of snappy growl issued from the darkness behind the light.

After an impatient repetition of the growl I recognized it as "Stick 'em up!" But did that girl get it? While I raised my hands wildly above my head (and as I'm a fat man that is no easy feat in a roadster) she inquired in a bored, conversational tone: "What's it all about? Do you know?" My nerves were getting a bit ragged by that time—though nothing to what they were a little later—and I growled back: "We're being held up! Better put your hands up."

DID she do it? No, she just looked at me and began to giggle because she thought I looked funny with my hands stretched up over my head. Perhaps I did, but was it any time to laugh about it when a gun was pointing at my midriff?

"Get out of the car," the bandit then ordered. Well, she did that but when I attempted to do likewise I found it impossible, being fat, as I have said, to move from behind the wheel with my arms in that awkward position. That dumb female stood on the curb and laughed long and merrily.

About then the highwayman became

impatient. "Hurry up!" he barked. "What's the idea of all the delay?"

"Well, I'm a fat man, and I'm stuck behind this wheel," I very meekly responded. Evidently he was logical, and not hard-hearted, for he said, "All right; drop your hands and move out—quick!" I complied hastily, my exertions speeded up still further by the vastly amused laughter of my companion.

I REACHED the ground and raised my hands again. The robber went through my pockets and appropriated my bill-fold, containing my week's allowance. Even this did not seem to make the girl realize that it was a really serious business, and she stood on the curb watching interestedly until the hold-up artist, having finished with me, called to her to come to him and deliver her valuables.

Right there my nerves received the shock of my life because instead of behaving like a rational being and handing over whatever he wanted that fool woman walked up to the bandit and after looking him over exclaimed: "Why, he is a real hold-up man; he has a black mask and everything."

I thought that surely the moment had come when I would have to risk my life in protecting that scatter-brain. But the bandit merely growled out: "I like 'em nervy, all right, but I don't like 'em fresh!"—gave up the idea of getting anything from her, and ordered us to walk up the road away from the car.

I hoped that now the young lady had exhausted her capacity for foolishness—but my hope was vain, for as the highwayman told us to walk in the road in front of him, my lady complained: "I have on high-heeled slippers, so I'll have to walk on the sidewalk!" Again I poised myself desperately for a fight, thinking surely the bandit would use violence to enforce his wishes. But, surprisingly, my defiance was not necessary, for with a long-suffering sigh he grabbed her arm and helped her up the high curb, grumbling, said: "All right, walk on the sidewalk then."

My nerves became quiet at that and once more I hoped that girl had reached her limit of impudence. She walked silently along for a bit and then inquired: "Say, Mr. Bandit, how about giving us back part of that money? We have a picnic on for tomorrow and we can't go unless you give some of it back."

Can you guess what happened? That bad, bold desperado meekly asked in a weary tone: "Well, how much would you have to have?"

"Oh, about ten dollars," she replied blithely and, upon my word, he extracted my bill-fold from his pocket, and selecting a ten-dollar bill, handed it to me, at the same time commanding us: "Go along back to your car and get t'hell out of this!"

That's what I call a forbearing man, even though devoted to a career of crime!

WE went on the picnic the next day but afterward I said a permanent good-by to that lady. A female who can take as a joke a hold-up—with a gun poking one in the ribs—is just too dangerous to have around. The next highwayman might not be quite so polite a gentleman.

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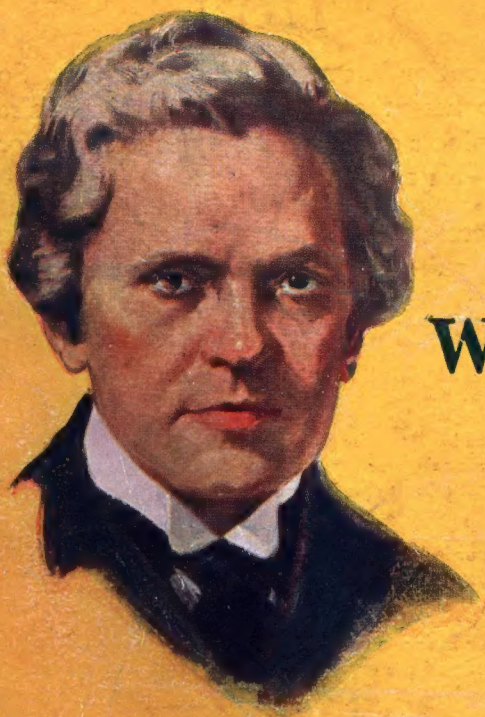

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