"Valley of the Short Men" — RAY NAFZIGER
"The No-Shirt Maru" — FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

Short Stories

April 25th ...vice A Month

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"The Briefing"

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A. A. CAFFREY

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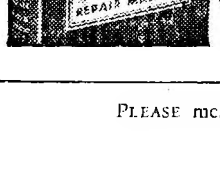

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M. DELANEY, *Secretary.*

D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.*
LAMONT BUCHANAN, *Associate Editor.*

BIGGEST AND BEST—TWICE A MONTH

Stories

latest stories—no reprints

APRIL 25th, 1944

Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

Overseas Mail

UNDER this heading in each issue of SHORT STORIES we plan to publish letters from men in our armed forces overseas. For each one we use its sender will receive a $25.00 war bond. Won't you send us one? We cannot guarantee to return unused ones, but we want representative letters showing what is happening to our young men in their greatest adventure.

Address the Editor, SHORT STORIES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Do not send original letters; have them copied.

This is from a Captain of Marines in the South Pacific; besides being a good fighter, he is a combat reporter. It was written to an artist friend of his—also of ours.

Dear Ed:

This mimeographing is an experiment, and the only way I can let all my friends know I am safe and what has happened in the past few days since we took this former paradise and made it a hell on earth. Until things get stabilized this carbon will have to tell the story.

My part in the invasion was rather unimportant, but very interesting. I came ashore in a higgins boat about three hours after the first troops hit the beach. I landed at "Yokahama" Pier and crawled onto the dock. Bullets were whining all over the waterfront, and quite a few men were peering over the cement seawall across a 50-foot stretch of water and onto the land ahead. It seemed a prudent thing to dig me a hole, so I did. At the time I remember being more annoyed at some Jap cockroaches than at the firing. I dug me a hole, set up my typewriter and wrote a two-page yarn because it seemed the thing to do, and kept me busy. I secured my machine and gear, and crawled toward the shore over the rubble on the pier. Ashore, I found a few of my combat correspondents, photogs and some of the civilian press. We all decided to go to the regiment headquarters, but en route met Capt. Tim Hanson, who offered to show us a pill box and some Jap dead his own men had taken a few minutes before. We went down to the beach, which has a rather wonderful shelving wall and stopped at a dugout full of intelligence people.

All of a sudden the spot became unhealthy and we hit the deck. Hanson ducked behind the pill box, the civilians ran into the pill box and I wound-up flat on my face between two very dead and very naked Japs. The firing let up after a few minutes and we stopped Marines on the beach from firing. Once again that p. m. I hit the deck when a mortar shell zoomed overhead. That night I was persuaded against sleeping on the pier (some Marines and Japs were killed on the pier that night), and myself and a small section dug into the beach. All that night there was the damnedest firing you ever heard; bullets went whizzing over our heads with a ping or a zing; tracers split the night with scarlet trails, and now and then a star shell would light up the night like a beacon.

I guess I was too dumb to be scared and managed to sleep fairly sound for part of the night. Next morning we flushed three Japs out of a pill box about 10 yards from our resting place! Oh yes, it rained on and

(*Concluded on page* 7)

ARE YOU IN THE CLUTCHES OF INSECURITY?

ARE you too young to fail — and old enough to admit that each conscious moment affords a possible *opportunity*? Do present circumstances compel you to make drastic changes in your future? Is someone *dependent* upon you to guess or *think* your way out of your dilemma? Perhaps you are in a sort of suspended animation — awaiting what will happen —wondering what to do next.

Do you know that certain hours are best to seek promotion — and to *start new ventures?* Do you know that there are forces of your mind which can— profoundly and properly — *influence others* in your behalf? Do you know that *you can mentally create* many passing fancies, fleeting impressions, into *concrete realities?* As a human you exist in a sea of invisible, natural *Cosmic forces.* They can be utilized by your greatest possessions—*self and mind.*

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Scribe A. A. G.
The Rosicrucians, AMORC
San Jose, California

Gentlemen: Kindly send me, without obligation, the *free* booklet, *"The Mastery of Life."* I understand it explains how I may share and *study* the methods and teachings taught for centuries by the ancients and Rosicrucians for the mastery of *self*, and the development of personal power. I am not merely idly curious but sincere in my request.

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Where Short Men Are Strangers

INTRIGUED by the title of Ray Nafziger's novelette in this issue, we asked the author: "What about it? What about these 'Short Men' and their valley?" Mr. Nafziger gave us the following information on the Front Grant country where, so he tells us, Stewart Edward White got his material for that classic of the West, "Arizona Nights."

Reveals Ray Nafziger:

"It was some ten years ago on a frosty morning on the big '76 Ranch' near Fort Grant, Arizona, when I first heard the term 'short men.' I was riding with some cowboys who were hunting wild cattle in mountain country that should be reserved for goats. The way these cowboys spurred down those brushy, rocky slopes raised the hair on my head; it's my opinion that the power dive must have originated in the mind of an Arizona cowboy on a fast cowpony.

"On this morning the cowboys were limbering up their stiff cold ropes by holding them over a clump of beargrass they'd set afire when one of them remarked that when he was a boy in this Fort Grant country, it was full of short men.

"'Short men' the way he explained them were strangers who drifted in sort of looking back over their shoulders maybe for sheriffs. They'd stay awhile, maybe mix in a little rustling, and then suddenly disappear.

"Just then the foreman spotted Herfordish faces in the brush across canyon and the chase was on. When I trailed back to camp late in the day, as usual after everybody else had made it in, I took up the subject of the short men again, wondering how the term started. No one knew, but we agreed it probably came from the fact that these were men who could stay in one country only a short time or maybe that because of their way of life they were destined to live a comparatively short time. Anyway I decided I'd write a yarn some time about the short men of old Arizona. 'Valley of the Short Men' is it." *Ray Nafziger.*

News Notes

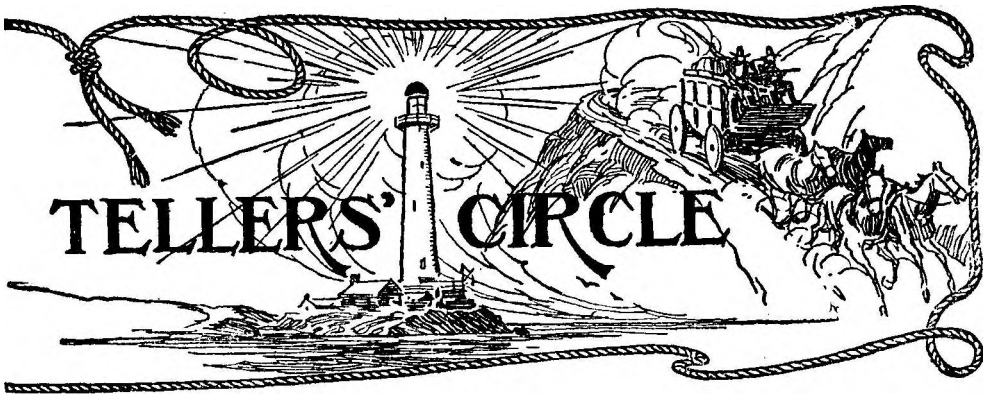
WE HAD a letter from Patrick O'Keeffe the other day—you know our sea-going radio operator friend who's been in the Merchant Marine for a long time and has written us stories about his trade. He sent us one, on the fly—just back from several months in the Mediterranean and was then returning to Norfolk.

"No" to No-Shirt?

FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE, whose story, "The No-Shirt Maru," appears in this issue of SHORT STORIES is worried. He's wondering whether No-Shirt has been doing the right thing.

Wonders Pierce:

"In 1937 I made a trip that included Bristol Bay, Pribilof Islands and East Cape, Siberia. The Japs were then in Bristol Bay with their three-mile nets, helping them-



selves to the red salmon that we had built to an annual *crop* by conservative methods. Net scarred salmon were coming into our canneries and they were beginning to shut down for lack of fish.

"Personally I was in luck because out of the situation I got material for a *Saturday Evening Post* article, much fiction material, and more information on the damned Japs. They had salmon canneries in Russian waters, were depleting the supply, and because they were fish-eaters, looked with greedy eyes on our fishing grounds. The Bristol Bay move was the last of a series which began when they moved into the Russian fisheries, then into the Bering Sea, etc.

"Actually the fishermen's union stopped the advance. They talked things over with the longshoremen's union, which plainly indicated that unless the Japs cleared out they would stop loading their ships on the West Coast. That was language the Japs understood, particularly as their ships were carrying, among other items, scrap iron.

"No-Shirt McGee, familiar with the situation, was more than glad to contribute a little something to the war effort by reducing Tojo's supply of salmon. Hence, the No-Shirt Maru. Perhaps this is basically a terrible mistake—I've read on several occasions where our own men have enjoyed captured Jap salmon. Perhaps No-Shirt should have allowed the canneries to continue in operation. Captured salmon saves us packing and shipping costs."

Frank Richardson Pierce.

Overseas Mail

(*Concluded from page* 4)

off all night. We lost most of our casualties during that night, I found out later. After that there wasn't much to do but take care of the civilians and the stuff stateward. We were washed out of our beach Press Club the fourth day, but established Hqs in a room where 37 Japs had been burned alive.

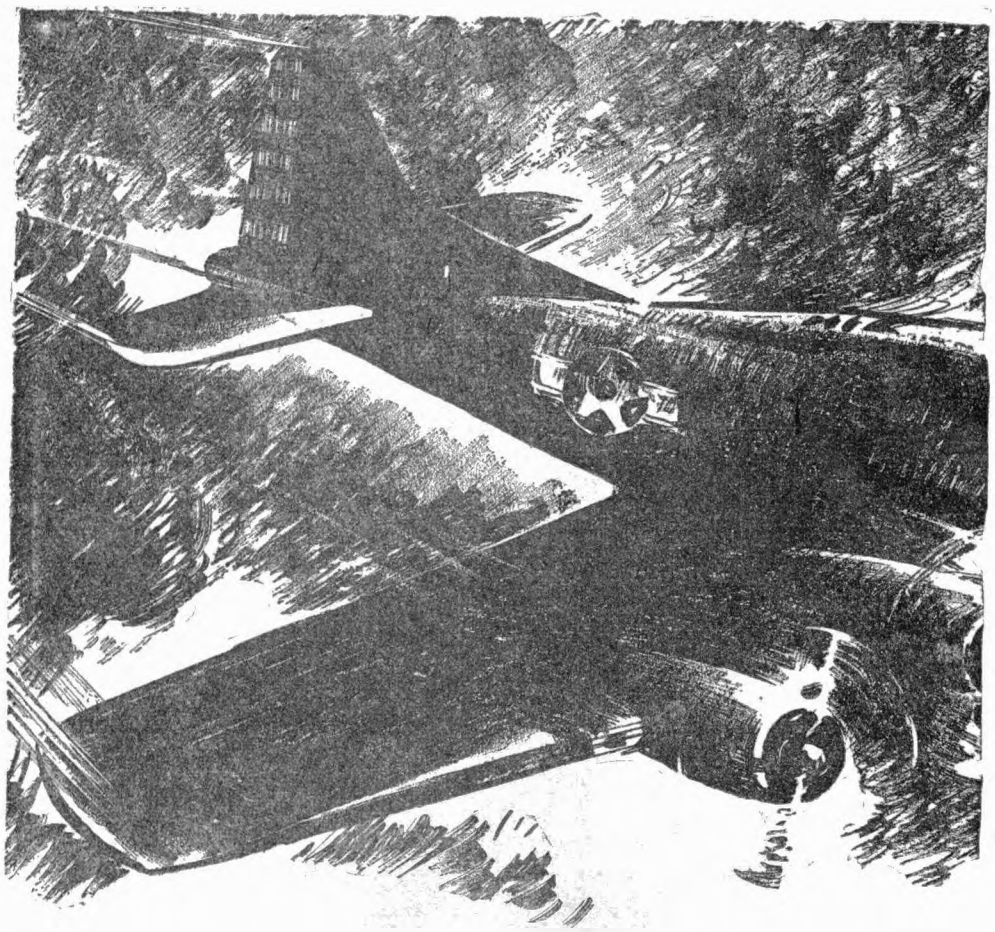
This is written by kerosene lamp in a building ventilated by 16-inch shell holes. I have a few souvenirs for your bloodthirsty old soul including a piece of a red circle on a Zero wing. Cut especially for you. This letter is being written in Jap ink, and the room I use as an office once belonged to a Vice Admiral. Outside, the moon plays tricks on the palm trees and we wait for the air raid siren. You would love to paint those fantastic and incredible surroundings.

I am happy, busy, and in good health. I don't like war, and there's nothing glamourous or romantic about it. I have a mustache and crave a shower. Next installment comes later. *Bill.*

THE BRIEFING

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY

Author of "American Bombsight," etc.



I

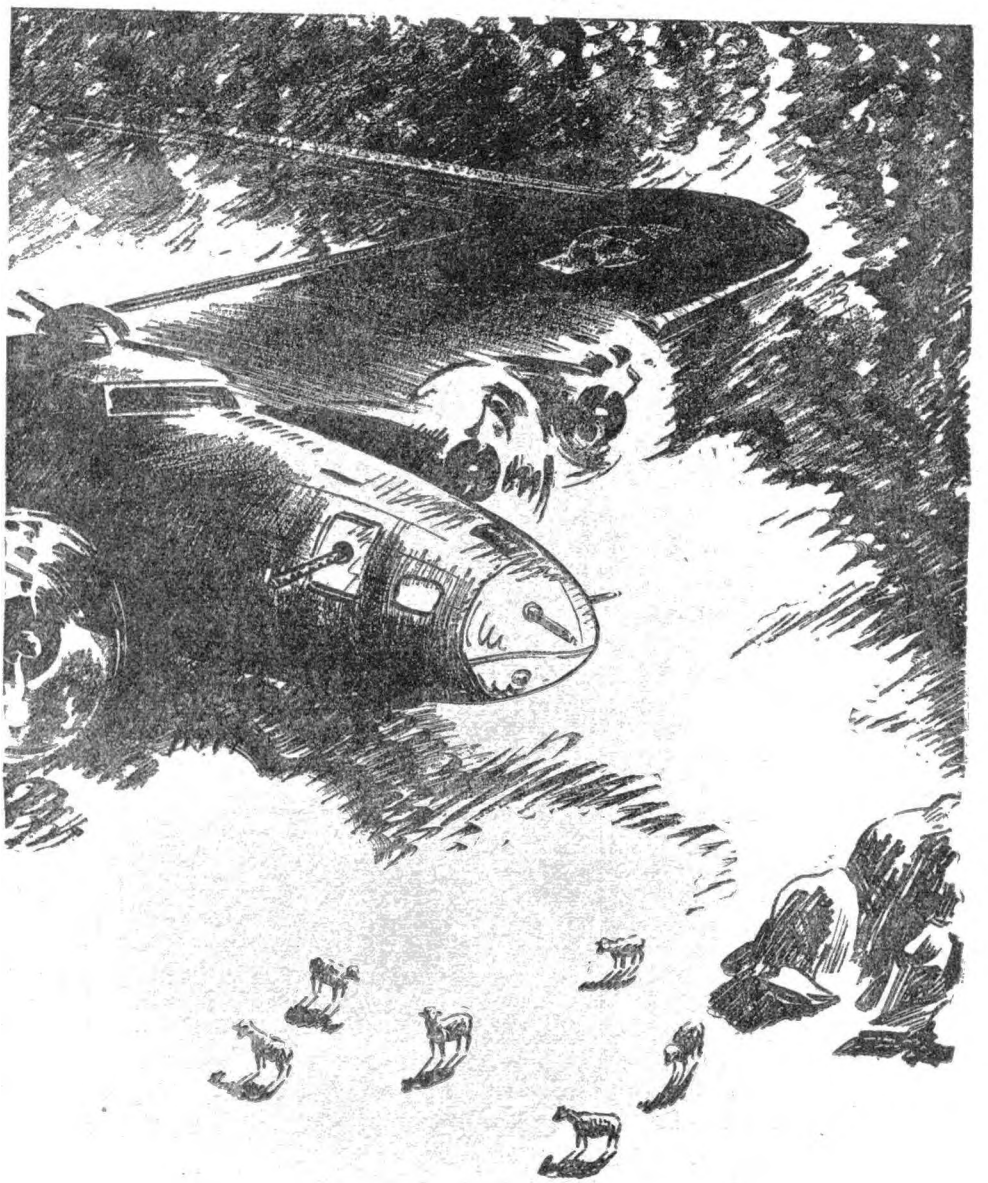
ASIDE from walking on the water—thus leaving footprints on the painted pond in the painted meadow on the painted runway in the well-camouflaged dispersion area—Corporal "Nevada" Anderson was a first-rate ex-cowboy and able, useful handler of phony sheep, horses and other inanimate live stock of the movie-prop variety. Now and then, Sergeant Yates, the pre-war old hand in charge of the painted meadow, had to tell off Nevada for that water-walking.

"Use your nut, kid," he advised. "Them Hun air cameras can pick up a footprint on water from 20,000 feet. Want us to get this dispersal area blown to hell'n'gone off the map of middle England?"

"Let 'em blow and be damned," Nevada Anderson would say. "It's the only way I'll ever see action."

Then old Yates would have to tell off the kid all over again. He'd have to tell the kid that he was lucky to be there, safe in the painted meadow, instead of where the ex-cowboy longed to be—behind one of the many guns of a Flying Fortress.

. . . . *All Told, a Large Piece of Hell Had Moved in and Set Up Business*



"You'll never get to go gunnin', Nevada," Yates had often warned. "Hell, kid, you're a key man here on the ol' paint farm. How would us city slickers know how stock stand, graze an' drift if it wasn't for you? Yes, sir, them Hun cameras would surrer'n' hell pick up this phony setup, an' smash us flat, but for the ol' kid as was brung up way off there where Nevada meets Oregon."

An old enlisted stiff like Yates wouldn't

have wasted any real worrying on the recruit if old Yates had any question of the lank ex-cowboy's real worth. Yates had cottoned to the Nevadan from the hour of the latter's first assignment to the meadow crew. And that's why the old hand also told off the new hand on matters that were strictly family. Such as when the kid first began to go wild-eyed about that Yank newspaper gal who was rushing in and out Operations trying to get to ride a bomber mission.

"Lay off," Sergeant Yates had advised. "That's officers' stuff, Kid. An enlisted stiff's gotta learn to keep Officers Row."

"How do ya mean?" Nevada Anderson had asked.

"What do I mean? Listen, kid, I'll tell you what a few of us know—this Mary Trimshippe gal is ol' Gen. Repaps sister's kid. I used to see her around Randolf, ten-twelve years ago. Now why the hell don't you make a play for that good-lookin' Polish dame that rides them jeeps with the Trimshippe gal?"

NEVADA said it was news to him. He said that she had never even hinted that the bomber command's commanding officer—Major-Gen. Repap—was related. But Nevada Anderson also added, that didn't make no neverminds. "I'll trail with my own royal-America right, Sarg," he stated, "and make my play for what I figure is the top winnings. And you can have the good-looking Pole."

"Hear the madman talk!" Yates had said. "Kid, ya've got one hell of a lot to learn, an' it ain't in books. Not even in the good ol' Blue Book, or the Articles of War, but they'll make you think it is. You're gonna be told, an how! Too bad, too."

The so-called Polish girl, a Miss Lodz, didn't seem to have much English, nor any too much room for Yank wolves, but she wore some sort of trick service uniform and seemed always to have the wheel of an American-issued jeep in hand. Maybe she was just a good promoter where good promoters were plenty. Like Mary Trimshippe, the good-looking, very-dark Pole was in the dispersal area often.

Aside from telling off the Nevada kid, and possibly guessing his chances with the Pole, Sergeant Yates' duties in the well camouflaged meadow consisted of shifting all those prop-cows, sheep, horses, ducks, wagons, haystacks, etc. They had to be shifted from time to time during the long grazing day—just so's passing German aerial cameras wouldn't find them all on the same spots during succeeding camera runs. And they had to be shifted clear of the take-off strip just before missions got under way: and then they had to be shifted right back again as soon as the Forts were on the wing. It was a steady job for Yates' crew. It was important. The Hun knew that there were dispersal areas thereabout: and the Hun was always on the probe. What's more, one day the Hun would locate the layout.

The other Yates Ranch cowhands chipped in their two-bits' worth. But as a general thing these were what you might call contented cowhands, guys without aerial-gunning ambitions, gents satisfied to stay there safely in the meadow where they could watch the brave ones fly away. These boys could get pretty loud, though, and Private Heller was the one who led the school of thought that said Corporal Nevada Anderson couldn't even stand the pre-mission briefing, say nothing of the hell a-wing that an aerial gunner must face.

"That briefing's just hell on wheels, Nevada," Heller would remind the lank ex-cowboy, "and like the Sarg says, you'd best hold what you have and forget the big-brave-man ideas. Man, oh man, what wouldn't that briefing do to you! Hell, cow-prod, it breaks guys. You know that?"

NEVADA knew that. He knew that the briefing was breaking more and more guys, but he also knew that it was something that had to be taken. And he, given the chance, could take it as well as the best of them. What's more, he had it coming. He rated it. He was, as his Gunnery School record showed in black and white, one first-class graduate aerial gunner. And a gunner he'd be or know the reason why. But it was going to take some doing, this in spite of the fact that Captain Case, officer in charge of Personnel Office, had promised and promised—and stalled and stalled.

"She's going to be a long war, Corporal," Case always said, "and it's wearing out plenty gunners. Don't be asking for it."

"The captain is right, Nevada," Mary

Trimshippe agreed when the long feller reported such Personnel Office finding to her.

"All right. All right," the impatient Nevada said. "Now how about the sergeant —is he right? You know what I mean—is Sergeant Yates correct as the devil when he tells me that you're the Old Man's favorite niece? Fess up, gal."

"Yes, the stinker general is my uncle," Mary Trimshippe finally admitted. "But I didn't want it known. If I get what I'm working for, I'll be the first woman to go out on a bombing run. I don't want anybody to think that family connections have anything to do with it. Fact is, if the Commanding stinker wasn't my uncle, I'd have won out long ago. Oh, I hope the old stinker breaks a leg."

"The general is right," Nevada stated. "Yes, sir; the uncle is a good man—er, with reservations, of course."

II

THE Yates Ranch boys had their Private Heller pegged as a torpid concentrate of G.I. Joe, gold brick, sad sack and outright eavesdropper. What's more, the guy got around and learned stuff. But the goldbricking was Sergeant Yates' worry. And when he found the private standing there in midmeadow, dopily watching two personnel cars going up the narrow road toward Headquarters, the old noncom had to call Heller's attention to the thing called work.

"Again!" Yates snapped. "Here you are, Private, standin' here wrapped in nothing but your own thoughts—and lookin' cold as hell, if anybody should ask me."

"There goes them dicks again, Sarg," Heller said, nodding toward the two scurrying cars, one of British make and the other American. "I got it straight that them Limies with the hard hats in the civvie clothes, 're Scotland Yard dicks. There's leaks in these dispersal areas, ya know, and one of these days—or nights— we gents're gonna get blown to hell off our contented sitters."

"Sez you!" said Yates. "Pick up that dam' cow and put it on the other side of the pond. An' don't you walk on that water, either—you an' your Scotland Yard!"

However, Heller could have been right. That night the area was blitzed, and when the wave of Hun bombers had passed there were dead Yanks and burning Forts out there beneath the towering trees where camouflage nettings had served so well against mere camera shots.

Next morning there was hell a-poppin'. Yates' crew had its hands full. Again and again, all morning long, that runway had to be cleared, allowing new Flying Forts to make landings. These were the replacement jobs up from the supply pool. New ships meant new crews, too, for a barracks had been hard hit by that raid.

It was like graverobbing, but Nevada Anderson had hopes, and one of the hopes was that he'd get one of the gunnery openings.

Late in the forenoon, Mary Trimshippe and Miss Lodz swept in from the king's highway and brought the jeep down to a stop when Nevada gave 'em a wave. And while Nevada and the girls were swapping a few words, along came the very official car bearing the two stars of General Repap. In passing, the old boy gave Mary Trimshippe a hard look, glanced back at Corporal Nevada Anderson, then sped on toward the big doings in the ancient manor house where was area Headquarters, the briefing hall, Operations, Personnel Office and all other points of command having to do with a busy Eighth Air Force layout.

"Raid or no raid," Mary Trimshippe told Nevada, "there's a sweep in force due for this afternoon. Something must have leaked, Nevada. The enemy was tipped off perhaps. Last night's thing didn't just happen."

"O, Miz Trimshippe, vee mus' now hurry oop," Miss Lodz urged. "It iss that we mus' hurry to get Personnel Office permission for attend dees briefing. Goo'by, Ser'gen'," and the Polish dame had the promoted jeep under way with a jerk and a roar.

Then the easy-going RAF man, Air Marshal Kidder, came along and pulled up for a few words with Sergeant Yates and his crew. As usual, Kidder had a few uniformed riding companions in his official car; and, as usual, they all reached eagerly when Yates broke out a new deck of Yank cigs. That's why Kidder always stopped.

Nevada managed to egg in on the gathering. He liked to hear Air Marshall Kidder shoot the breeze, for the Englishman was very free and chockablockful of live tips

on aerial doings. But today the fellow passengers were sort of fidgeting, and Kidder knew why. One of the fellow passengers, a tall, hungry-looking guy in some sort of a trick uniform, kept sliding a bony wrist out of its sleeve, studying his strap-watch.

"Gentleman's in a hurry, Sergeant Yates," Kidder kidded. "He wants to get along to Personnel Office. Desires a pass for the briefing. Don't go so much, m'self, for the bleeding briefing. That is, American style. Lord, you blighters're too, too long with the murderous grief."

"That's what we try to tell this Nevada kid," said Yates. "He wants to be an aerial gunner an' sit in on this briefin' grief."

"Perish the ambition," said Air Marshal Kidder. "Spare y'self the punishment, Nevada boy. Ah, no. Now I don't like to seem too critical of an ally, but for a fact, gentlemen, I think your command is overdoing this particular item. Too, too much hell before the chaps hop off and get a chance to run afoul the real hell.

"But we'll be seein' you! And many thanks for the fags."

"A good John," said Nevada. "But who the devil was the thin man with the crust to hurry an air marshal on his way like that? Cripes, Sarg, he was as bad as the Pole dame. She took that jeep right out from under my resting right G.I. shoe. Hey, doesn't it strike you that this thin guy in Kidder's car looks foreign, too?"

"The layout's all loused up with foreign-lookin' guys in trick uniforms," Yates said. "That's what comes of playin' war with all the little out-at-the-seat countries as allies. Guy, this is a bread line—not a battle line —that Uncle Sam's runnin'. We won't know who t'hell the guests were till the party's over an' Uncle Sam reaches for the check."

WHEN the hellish briefing was over, the Yates Ranch crew watched all those hundreds of airmen climb aboard jeeps, personnel cars, trucks and what have you, then roar away to the revetments here on this great English estate and back among the hills where were the other many camouflaged take-off strips of the area. Then Yates got the word to clear the long green cement runway, and for a short time even Nevada Anderson was too busy to bewail the fact that this was just one more mission he wasn't going to ride.

But the big ships hadn't even taken the first clearance signal from the control officer when a motorbike courier from the manor house came a-poppin' onto the Yates Ranch.

"You got a Corporal Anderson here, Sarg?" the rider asked.

Yates hooked a thumb toward Nevada Anderson.

"Captain Case wants him in Personnel. Pronto," said the rider. "And that means now."

"Maybe this is it," Nevada sang out, to Yates; and then he was on his way.

But it wasn't it. One quick look at Captain Case's face warned Nevada that the captain had more than a gunnery assignment on his mind. Case was a nice, big-hearted sort of a gent.

"Corporal," he said, "I'm going to make this short—even if I can't make it sweet. General Repap has asked me to remind you that you are an enlisted man, and that Miss Trimshippe is his niece."

That almost knocked the tall lad flat, but he swallowed a throat-clogging gulp, then agreed, "That is short and unsweet, sir. But, sir, is it regulations? And what does it mean?"

"They can make it regulations, Corporal," Captain Case said. "And it means—lay off. I'm sorry, Corporal, but I'm just taking orders—and relaying what I call dirt."

"Sir," Nevada asked, "would you give me permission to talk to General Repap? He's on this field."

"He was, Corporal," Captain Case said. "But he's going out with this mission. There goes the first Fort now. And the Old Man is riding it—The old heller's plenty gutty, Corporal."

III

HEADQUARTERS offices were in the west wing of the great manor house. Over in the south wing was the classic barny grand hall, a beamy, wainscotted vault of great chests, heavy shadows and lurking ghosts of the dim past. And here was the seat of briefing.

Nevada Anderson, quitting Personnel Office, cut across the lawn between west and

south wings, deciding that he might just as well talk this thing over with Mary Trimshippe while he was still hot under the collar. Maybe it would be good-by. Then again, perhaps, it wouldn't. But the girl should have a chance to speak her piece. He guessed that he'd locate her among the others who usually hung around the briefing hall long after the crews had gone out airborne.

Arriving at the south wing, Nevada decided to go in through one of the small musty rooms of the inner approach to the big hall. Just as he came to a door on the terrace, the long ex-cowhand gazed up to watch a group of home-field Forts rounding into formation at about three thousand feet—low and plenty noisy. And just as he put his hand on the clanking latch that would open the heavy door, all the thunder of those passing Forts seemed intent upon reaching down and pressing the manor house into the ground. It was terrific, and not even Nevada could hear the clank of the heavy latch as the door opened inward under his slow push.

The two people in that small room hadn't heard the latch either. The woman—and Nevada recognized Lodz's back—had her nose hard up against a door that was cracked just a hair's breath. That door, Nevada knew, gave on the inner end of the briefing hall. At the woman's side, with a scrap of scratch paper in hand, was a tall, thin fellow, plus one of the many trick uniforms, and Nevada thought he had this guy pegged too.

Nevada, still unheard and unseen, stepped back and quit that door when the latch touched the jamb—and he didn't chance closing it. Then he moved rapidly down-terrace, glanced back when he neared the lane where the great front doors of the hall stood open, then saw Miss Lodz and the tall boy friend hurry out and start for a jeep. They appeared furtive, businesslike.

There were groups of allied war correspondents and soft-spot Air Forces offices swapping ideas on the front terrace, and even two or three uniformed members of the weaker sex, but no Mary Trimshippe in evidence. So Nevada shouldered through the groups and took a look through the wide-open front doors. There, at the far end of the briefing hall, Mary Trimshippe sat on the edge of a large wallside chest alongside Air Marshal Kidder and two Yank officers.

Mary caught Nevada's eye. She glanced at her wrist-watch, stepped down from the high chest seat, excused herself and strode toward where the ex-cowboy waited.

"No luck? No ride, 'em, airgirl, eh?" Nevada asked.

"Not a chance," she answered, a bit bitterly, at that. "We couldn't even get in to the briefing. Air Marshal Kidder and those other officers just now gave me the target, strictly in confidence. But what good is it! I can't use it. But let's get out of here—where's Lodz? I want to get back to town."

"I think the girl friend's already rolled, Mary gal," Nevada said. And by that time they were around on the west side of the hall where Mary and Lodz had parked the jeep. It was gone.

"Darn that Pole!" said Mary Trimshippe. "She stands me up like this more times! Good Lord! I wonder why?"

However, some of her fellow correspondents offered Mary a lift, and Nevada had no chance to mention his brief, unsweet tour of duty on Captain Case's official carpet. Well, that would keep.

That evening, and all through the night, all the news was bad. It was one of the days when the Yank bomber command reported a fifty-plus loss in big ships. Kiel had been the target; and the Hun air fighters were on hand to cover Kiel as no target had ever been covered before. Six forts failed to come back to the Yates' Ranch meadow. All those who did come home, each hard-hit and staggering, had wounded aboard. And the ship carrying General Repap was among those listed as missing. None had seen it go down.

All that night, and all the next morning, the area was strictly "in work." It was no time to lie down and lick wounds, and every man was told to hit the ball and build things back so's a bigger sweep could be tried, and right now. It was even breezed about that the next target was already up.

Private Heller was up to the very last word in real live dope, too. He pointed out certain cars that rushed in and out along the drives. Some, he said, were Scotland Yard men, others just plain U. S. Army Intelligence workers. Nevada Anderson guessed that it was time to tell somebody about the Lodz dame. Yates said hop to it.

There was a cordon of M.P.'s thrown

around the briefing hall, so Nevada went along to Personnel Office. Captain Case listened, then called in a Major Peacemaker, officer in charge of Intelligence. Peacemaker said, "This Polish-dame angle sounds like something, now let's phone Air Marshal Kidder and check on the tall-thin-and-hungry guy you say was riding his official car. Both listening, eh?"

Over the phone, Kidder reported that he didn't know the thin man at all. He knew that one of the three with him was a Medical Corps man, as for the others—"Those two Johnnies? Dammit, Major Peacemaker, they just came with the car. Eh, you say one of 'em was eavesdropping with the Polish lady. Just a mo', old man! Hold the line—here comes Miss Trimshippe into my office."

Over the phone Mary Trimshippe said she could lead them to Miss Lodz' living quarters, and that said quarters housed a small colony of exiles, emigres, international tramps and other queers.

"Miss Trimshippe," Major Peacemaker said, "you get over to that address, and Corporal Anderson and I will be there right *now*."

Major Peacemaker put in just one more call, this to an Inspector Greenlief. Nevada knew that this must be top man among the "hard hat" Scotland Yard men so often mentioned by Heller. The major asked Greenlief to meet them at a point near Sheffield. Then he picked up two of his fellow Yanks, at the briefing hall, and they rolled down the highway behind an M.P. motorbike escort.

Mary Trimshippe was waiting in front of a court-yard assembly of what might have been artists' quarters. Inspector Greenlief flashed the credentials and the landlord told what he knew. "They're all empty t'dye," he explained. "Guests've all gone. But mind ye, they was all proper people."

"Yes, the landlord knew the Polish dame, and the "proper people" had departed in such haste as to forget a radio set. It was a short-wave set, at that. And as Peacemaker & Co. walked in to take a look, that short-wave outfit was babbling in German. Agent Hass, one of Greenliefs "hard hat" men, took down the Germanic chatter.

Finally, Hass made known the receivings: "The meat and greens were received, Herman" "Herman, try and send us some cloth." "Kornelia received the toys, Anna. She would appreciate some small stones, or even large ones." "Walter and Stephan, your laundry is back."

"Can't make much of this 'cloth', 'toys', 'small' or 'even large stones'," Agent Hass growled. "May be code, eh what?"

Mary Trimmshippe said, "Miss Lodz used the word 'meat' and 'rocks'—which could be the large stones—in her strange bits of shop talk. She called information 'cloth'—any statistics, that is."

"Landlord, can you recall any of the given names of the proper people?" Inspector Greenlief demanded.

"Aye. John. Micha. 'Erman, an' a nawsty devil was that un."

"Herman?" exclaimed Major Peacemaker. "A tall, thin man?"

"Aye. Naught but skin an' bones. 'E was a dandy in uniform. Said as 'ow 'e was a flyer o' sorts. So 'e did. The nawsty—"

"We're hot, Mr. Greenlief," said Peacemaker. "But like Annie, they ain't livin' here any more. However, I guess this job belongs to your department."

"And a fine pot of fish you've handed us," said Inspector Greenlief. "The exiles and enemies are all mixed up, gentlemen."

IV

BRIG.-GEN. CANIJORY replaced Mar's uncle. As yet, the German radio had failed to announce the capture of a general. Mary had told Nevada that the new Strategical Command head, Canijory, should be a pushover for her purpose—and perhaps for Nevadas—in view of the fact that he was an old family friend.

"I'm sure working on him," she whispered to Nevada.

At the same time, Major Peacemaker and Captain Case were doing a job of work for Nevada, just because the boy rated a leg-up. One and the same bulletin, Nevada and old Yates were relieved of duties on the paint farm and assigned to Gunnery. After that things whirled fast; and at 4:30 next morning all crews were turned out, fed, put to bomb-loading and ship servicing, with the brievng set for 7:30. The briefing! The thing that Heller said Nevada couldn't take.

The briefing hall in the manor house wouldn't hold the thousands to be briefed

for this sweep, so they packed the great lawn between south and west wings. Nevada and Sergeant Yates were among the first to arrive.

"That's Maj.-Gen. Mawson," Yates told Nevada, pointing to an officer on the terrace, up where were the maps and seats for the men who would talk. "He's Mr. Big with the Tactical Air Force. Know what that means, kid?"

"A big push," Nevada guessed.

"Plenty," said Yates. "It might be D-day, time for the Yates Plan, calling for a landing on Germany itself. . . . Hey, kid you're up for a promotion. The C.O. told me you're in line for a staff sergeancy. Nice goin'."

At 7:30, with the milling hordes finally bedded down on the briefing lawn, Colonel Saint took pointer in hand, rapped the side of a blackboard and sang out, "Quiet—please. Gentlemen, er, ah, *lady* and gentlemen!"

All heads turned rearward, to follow Colonel Saint's glance, and there was Mary Trimshippe—back there among the correspondents slated to ride this mission. Nevada Anderson choked down a lump.

"Today," Saint then went on, "we give you a target, it is a—" The colonel stopped talking and glanced behind him. Air Marshal Kidder, a bit late, was coming onto the terrace. He, too, was dressed for flight.

"Sorry," Kidder said. "Carry on, Colonel Saint."

Saint's pointer waved in mid-air. He said, "It's a tough nut, airmen. "There she be!" And his pointer's end fell.

Men sucked in, gulped, and a few whistled low. Somebody groaned. A man down front giggled sillily. A group of three flight surgeons down front stood up and took a look at the giggler. Yes, this was a briefing. The start of a tough piece of hellish schooling. For Colonel Saint's pointer was on Helgoland.

Helgoland! Germany's last tower of strength. Germany's one great hope against actual homeland invasion. Helgoland where anti-aircraft guns had been growing —wild and fast—for twenty years.

The Colonel Saint outlined what they could expect to meet. Enemy aircraft. Thousands of them. And Air Marshal Kidder was rubbing his horse face and staring at the floor. Flak ships. Perhaps hundreds of them. Kidder began to cross and recross his long legs.

Two other highrankers, late like Kidder, tiptoed to chairs behind the speaker. They were the Generals Canijory and Mawson, and both were dressed for high-altitude work.

After Saint came officers who spoke of flying tactics, cloud formations and weather; and Air Marshal Kidder fidgeted as though these were the straws to break a camel's back.

Thirty-five minutes of the hell was down when Colonel Heater took his allotted time to mention air-traffic rules, especially where rendezvous after the target figured. And by then Kidder was trying to sleep.

General Mawson, he of the Tactical Air Force, next told just where his ships would come into the picture; and the picture was plenty big. Big and awful. Terrific. A crewman in the rear yelled once, then passed out cold. The medics took care of him.

Kidder awoke with a start. He glanced at General Canijory, then leaned over and said something. The Yank general just shook his head and stared at the briefing officer's back.

General Mawson then spoke of one particular piece of work, about the Forts that had been equipped with extra guns. "Chiefly," he said, "these gun Forts are going in to look for hidden enemy fighter fields—on that German north coast. Our Air Support Command medium bombers will be standing by. If these gun Forts find the hidden fields, radio the findings, our boys will come in and polish those fields off."

There was a great quiet on the audience then. This was a new piece of work—so was the Air Support Command itself.

AFTER General Mawson finished, Colonel Saint, being too damned thorough, came back to say a few more words about those special-job gun Forts. And he warned as to what they must face—flying so low and searching out the hidden fields. Well another crewman groaned and passed out. And Kidder bit his lower lip. An hour of the long briefing ordeal had passed. Finally Colonel Saint turned to Kidder and asked him whether he'd like to add anything.

"Good Lord — no!" the Englishman blurted out. "'Nuf's been said, Colonel Saint. Damning the briefing. Eh, beg your pardon, sir."

"No offense, sir," Saint answered; and he, too, realized fully that enough had been said, and even repeated.

V

"WHO are you riding with, Lady?" Nevada asked, hooking an arm through Mary Trimshippe's when the briefing broke up.

"With Colonel Haslip," Mary answered. "General Canijory and Marshal Kidder are aboard, too."

"Say nothing of Sergeant Yates and Corporal Anderson," said Nevada. "That's the old 'Slave Driver,' Mary. Yep, we're together."

Major Peacemaker and Captain Case were working out among the revetments when Mary, Nevada and Yates arrived at "The Slave Driver" where that big job still rested under its camouflage nets.

Peacemaker said, "I just want to tell you folks that Inspector Greenlief phoned this morning—before I was out of the hay—and said his Britishers had rounded up several of the birds who flew that spy nest. But they didn't get the Lodz woman nor the thin man. And a spy ring it was, too."

"The Slave Driver" was ready to go, and she was one of the Forts due to go out light in bombs, but heavy in extra machine-gun equipment. Nevada shuddered a bit when he learned that, not for himself, but for Mary. He wondered how come General Canijory would allow her assignment to this particular Fort.

So there wasn't much gab and gayety in the long ex-cowboy when he showed Mary into her Mae West, then the parachute harness, and checked each item to make certain she was as fit for flight as a careful guy could make her. And in due course of time, Colonel Haslip and his high-ranking fellow airmen drove up in a jeep.

Motors were revving every place now. Swarms of fighter coverage were buzzing high in the blue. The boys out on the green take-off strip were moving the livestock, phony hedgerows, hay wagon, and the small pond that Nevada Anderson wouldn't be leaving footprints on today.

Colonel Haslip said that his co-pilot had moved up to captain another ship. So General Canijory said he'd fill the right-side seat. Haslip's nose gunner was on the sick list. Kidder said he was just the man for that bow station, and he took it. Mary Trimshippe went aboard and was assigned a drop seat in the navigator's bay, right near young First Lieutenant Daniels.

In the radio bay was Sergeant Lasky, while the topside ball turret was in the hands of Gunner Sergeant Ballard. Tail Gunner "Stinger" Ray was aft in his cramped compartment; and "Stump" Stanhope had worked his way into the belly ball. Sergeants White and Murphy, the regular waist gunners, were to share honors with Nevada and Yates.

Fourteen souls aboard "The Slave Driver" were in place. And soon this, the lead ship, was waddling toward the head of the runway. And one after the other, out from under their hiding places, came the ships that would follow her into the air and eastward toward terrible Helgoland, 400 miles across the North Sea.

Colonel Haslip took the control officer's signal and roared her off the green strip. Up came the others for formation. And as far as the eye could see, in all directions, more and more flights were getting under way. There was going to be a skyful of Yanks on this party.

At 10,000 they drilled out to sea between the Himber and The Wash, leading the train, with that skyful of flights behind. The roadsteads below were packed with troop ships, and Yates pointed them out and yelled, "There's what I mean—the Yates Plan all set!"

Sergeant Ballard—up in the ball turret—started firing. And Kidder's nose gun was almost as sudden. A flight of ten Focke-Wulf-190s had opened the party. And now the "Slave Driver" chattered with gun recoil, then the enemy wave passed aft. That was just the opener, and other enemy flights were out ahead. But Haslip's element was taking on altitude. Soon 22,000 was on the dial, and the crew was on oxygen. When half the North Sea passage had been logged, 26,000 was on the altimeter, and sixty miles to starboard were those off-shore Netherlands Islands.

"Enemy fighters at nine o'clock!" Kidder

sang out; and another storm had hit. But they were not only at nine o'clock, but straight up, on all sides and from down under. More of 'em than any Yank had ever seen. Waist Gunner White got two Huns with one burst.

The lad was hot. Yates, standing by to help service that gun, should anything happen to the broad cartridge belt that looped down from the overhead, watched White pick off a third Hun ship with another short burst. "Am I hot!" the kid cheered.

"Hot!" yelled Yates. "Kid, you're perfect. Now rack up a few for me. Looks like you won't need ol' Yates at all."

Sergeant White wasn't the only one scratching Huns. From Kidder's nose gun to Stinger Ray's tail position, the big ship tattooed to the recoil. And one by one, gun position after gun position called their hits back over the interphone. Colonel Haslip and his co-pilot general officer — sitting there more or less cold-bait and frozen, as far as actual fighting action went—hoped hope against hope that the interphone would bring nothing but home-team scores. But that would be too good, for "The Slave Driver" was sure flying exhibition, right out front there, and somebody was likely to get hurt.

Somebody did get hurt, badly hurt. Captain Samuels, piloting his "Schemiel," manned by what he called his all-Hester Street crew, had been flying first ship off "The Slave Driver's" right wing. Of a sudden, the "Shlemiel" wasn't there. The force of the explosion that took it away seemed to throw "The Slave Driver" atop the crest of a towering wave, then parts of the Fort that was no more came rattling through the starboard windows. The general ducked, and a whistling something, coming through that starboard control-cabin slide-panel, missed his head by inches, just tipped the nose-piece of Colonel Haslip's oxygen mask, then holed a port-side pane and whistled again as it tangled with one of the left-wing propellers.

Back in the waist-gunners' bay, Nevada and Yates were pulling Gunner White to his feet. White was cussing in his semi-dazed condition.

"The so-an'-so's!" he said. "They're tossin' bean balls at me. Let me at that gun! That stuff don't go in this league!"

Hardly had "The Slave Driver" come down from the high wave tossed up by the "Shlemiel's" passing before another hellish quick series of explosions flashed off to the left. One of the oldest Forts in the group, its fuselage marking saying "Just Junk," was a ball of flame. A ball of flame falling. Now one chute was opening as it fell. Then a second chute. That was all.

The flight pushed ahead. The droves of attacking enemy fighters swept rearward among the hundreds of Flying Forts that came and came. But the enemy was paying dearly, for the mighty fire-power of the big Yank ships was telling as it had told all through the months gone by since that day when the Flying Fortress outlived the ignominy of Flying Target and set itself up as the flying threat.

GENERAL CANIJORY, watching that flying hell moving back among his followers, made a quick decision and turned to Radioman Lasky. Lasky put the general on the ship-to-ship radiophone; then the big boy did his stuff.

Glancing at his knee-pad's scratch sheet, he noted certain ship numbers. He picked three. These were gun ships. He barked those pilots to attention.

"These enemy fighters must be up from a Netherlands base, a hidden field," he said. "You three men fall out and go down. Give 'em hell and stay with them. Stay with them till they're forced to land for want of fuel. That is all."

Three Forts slid down like elevators with the cables cut. Those pilots were plenty-hot ship handlers. They actually side-slipped the great tonnage as though kicking a pursuit job into a fast fall.

The operation had a surprising result. Seeing those three big ships start earthward, a full fifty Hun pilots got the idea that here were three helpless ships quitting the fight. Helpless ships are always fine German meat. So the Hun carrion birds quit the heavy-fire competition and went after what they thought was easy pickings. And seeing that they had drawn off so large a number of the enemy, the three Fort pilots put everything on the ball, even increased the rate of sideslip, and invited pursuit.

But a Fort can't do that, not for long. One by one, the game boys lifted their

mighty ships out of the slip and back to level flight. Watching as best he could, General Canijory saw the three work quickly into a tight V—the best possible formation for mutual defense—and then the flock of predatory vultures closed for the kill. But for the first few moments of play, they were in on nobody's murder but their own. General Canijory yelled to high heaven—almost shaking the big Fort—when he saw three Messers splash into the red all at one time—ah, but that couldn't go on. Forty or fifty against three.

The general was glad he couldn't see more, glad that the forward sweep took that sight from his scope of rear vision.

But what was that! It was Tail Gunner Stinger Ray yelling over the interphone.

"Those three Forts," he cheered, "ain't doing too bad now. Hell's bells! There's a flock of those long-range, two-tailed, pilot-killing, enemy-murdering Lightnings in among 'em! And are the Huns getting to hell'n'gone away from there!"

General Canijory spoke interphone then. "Tail Gunner," he asked, "are all three still afloat?"

"All three, sir. For a fact, sir, they're shagging some of the Huns themselves. They're doing swell, by hell, sir!"

General Canijory, rubbing his hands and whooping above the roar of motors, yelled, "Swell by hell, he says! Swell by hell say I! But whew! whew! whew! Look out ahead. Take a look at what we're about to walk on."

"I've been looking at it, sir," said Colonel Haslip. "That, sir, is flak *as is* flak. Flak with the enemy side turned outward and up. I've heard men talk about it being thick enough to walk on, but I've never before seen it so close-packed that you could hardly hope to fall through it."

VI

THE lead formation was at an even 32,000 feet then; and, as a general thing, all Fort units following were carrying that figure on the altimeter. Below, at varying altitudes—down as far as the eye could catch their propeller flash and wing sunsplash—the groups of attack bombers—hundreds of them—were milling ahead toward the many sources of flak. Off to the port side, rear, a pack of fifty-odd Wellingtons were drilling ahead; and just behind them came a larger flight of Lancasters. And behind and beyond those two groups, other like units could be spotted, and beyond the others were still more. The thing was endless, and chances were, many flights had not yet quit England's shores.

"Look at 'em—the good-old Limie night-shifters, the swing and graveyard boys," Yates remarked, pointing portside and rearward through Gunner Murphy's blister. "Hell, I didn't suppose them ol' tomcats could find their way in the daytime. Gee, a whole million of 'em. Sometime get me to tell you about the times when Uncle Sam only had a few hundred planes in his whole dam' air force."

Fifty miles to the south, low on the horizon behind the East Frisians, Emden and Wilhelmshaven were still burning from the raids of two days ago. And there was a Chinese Wall of towering black smoke out dead-ahead, a barrier that seemed to come right up from a spot afire on the very North Sea itself. You knew without asking Navigator Daniels that this was Helgoland Island. Helgoland ready and waiting. Mighty Helgoland behind its smoke screen and under its blanket smudge. Helgoland, the real beginning of action, and, maybe, the end of the line.

"Miss Trimshippe," Colonel Haslip said, over the phone, and never taking his eyes from the flak-filled sky ahead, "will you kindly be very careful of you for the next few minutes? Keep your back snugly, comfortably against that armored bulkhead. Everybody else, on your toes. This is it. Have your chutes where you can reach them. We might have to grab our hats and go hence with dispatch."

Down below, far below, the attack-bomber units and long-range fighters were going in against the flak ships. Helgoland was ringed by those craft, and a rough, quick estimate told anybody with time to count that there were a full fifty still left to the German north-coast command. Added to the stationary flak ships—for they were stationary, taking the long chance for the sake of deadly gunnery—were the destroyer and cruiser strength; and Intelligence, both British and American, must have been all wrong on the number of naval battle craft still held by the Hun. Darting every whichway, try-

ing to protect the flak ships, these destroyers and cruisers now added their ack-ack. Most of it was multiple-gun ack-ack, and it was thrown up and out for the benefit of the oncoming attack-bomber and fighter planes. And, all told, a large piece of hell itself had moved in and set up business down there below five thousand feet. Already Yank and British aircraft were hitting the water, but also, three flak ships and three destroyers were aflame from end to end. And great oil slicks were aflame and hot.

If there hadn't been so much high rank in the pilots' cabin, there's just a chance that "The Slave Driver" would never have made its run across the target. After all, the bomb bay held only two cans of any size, and these were fragmentation bombs. It wasn't very likely that anybody on Helgoland was going to be moving afoot hither and yon during the next few minutes or hours, say nothing of days, weeks and months. However, insofar as the run was to be made, Colonel Haslip would drop what he could. So he made his last-minute shift of command. He phoned his bombardier, that thin young lieutenant who'd been sitting at Kidder's left all during the eastbound trip.

"Lieutenant Hall, it's all yours," he said. "There's your target. There's a few unsmudged openings over there on the south end, over in the barracks area. Anything look good to you?"

"I've been watching that area, sir," Bombardier Hall made answer. "I saw a pretty-good-sized crowd of gents pushing each other butt-over-teakettle into that big, flat-looking building. Aw, hell—'course you can't see it from here. But I've had the glasses on it. I'll try for that one, sir. A little to the starboard, sir—a few points more. Good."

Colonel Haslip was signalling his immediate formation, and the outfit was wheeling and giving away to the right with him.

Helgoland was close in then, perhaps not more than four miles from the vertical. And the flak was so solid that the smoke from the high bursts was beginning to turn the sunlight to green-yellow. Sergeant Ballard was phoning from his top turret.

"There's a million Messers and Wulfs coming down from about 40,000—" and his voice was blotted out by his gunfire. He had two guns that could throw it far.

Corporal Nevada Anderson, stepped forward to the navigation bay just as Lieutenant Daniels was stepping out. The navigator would now stand by for relief gunning, and for whatever else of battle service might come his way. So Nevada popped his head within the cubby's small protection, and said, "If I don't see you again, Mary, you—" And for a moment the masks were off.

"Lord, big boy, you never did this before!" she gasped.

"It's practically an army order," Nevada explained, and he held tight, "and it comes from an Intelligence man, Major Peacemaker, so it must be both intelligent and right. He told me only yesterday. And what I mean—he told me. . . . 'By, kid. They're on us!" The oxygen masks were back in place, and it was over.

They were on them — the diving Huns were; and they were on just about every other Fortress in the first three formations. Forts were in flames, too, so were Wulfs and Messerschmitts; and the mêlée, in that first minute of joining, took on a ferocity never before reached in air war. The Allied forces had a target to cross. Come hell and high water—or all the remaining fighter craft of the once-great Luftwaffe—but they'd cross it. Not one of them turned aside. For their part, the Luftwaffe fanatics —now narcotic primed and briefed with family-reprisal threat—were there to do or die. So, plane after plane, they crashed head-on into the whirling props of the oncoming Forts. That was the quick way to get it over with. Many, not so willing to tangle with props, tried other means of crashing—from atop, or from aside, any way to hold at least one big Allied craft away from Helgoland.

Somehow or other, "The Slave Driver" was still working behind four good motors —and apparently all in one piece—when Colonel Haslip heard Bombardier Hall sing out, "Bombs away!"

And the first bombs were on their way, whistling downward to Helgoland. But hellish Helgoland was whistling right back.

VII

THE Hun had boasted that he could throw ack-ack to fifty-thousand feet. He was proving it at Helgoland. What the briefing

promised would be met there, was being met, too. And the well-known defenses of such places as Berlin and the Ruhr Valley faded to popgun proportions when compared to what the Forts found themselves trying to permeate here.

When Bombardier Hall had sung out "Bombs away!" that, of course, meant that "The Slave Driver" was still just coming on the target. The west shoreline of Helgoland hadn't even been crossed. So all the hell that was Helgoland's own offering was yet to be met; and when it was met, in full blast, there was nothing that poor, feeble man—or woman—could do but sit tight, hope for the best, pray a bit, throw lead just for the sake of doing it, and wait.

The waiting was hell. The island-crossing was age-long and endless—and to think that there's less than a mile of its west-to-east width! Why, to get so much fire power on so small an island, the Hun must have had his ack-ack crews standing shoulder to shoulder. But it's a cinch they weren't getting in one another's way. Not much! Never before had so much vertical steel been tossed skyward across so many feet of projection in so short a time; and those who won through to tell about it were going to spend a lifetime trying to make others believe that Hitler still had so much material at the end of four years of a war wherein he had thrown everything with lavish, murderous hand.

And right in there where the stuff was being thrown, and where the bursts looked like solid fleece gathered from all the white and black sheep on earth, the grotesque spawn of the dying Luftwaffe was taking its blood bath right along with the Allied victims of this day of wrath. Too many of the victims of the fury were going down. But they were going down, not turning back. And as a rule, they went with a burst—sometimes targets for several flak bursts at one time,—so there was some mercy there. More slow ages dragged, and the crossing of Helgoland wasn't yet ended even for the first to come in—"The Slave Driver."

Radioman Lasky was manning a nose gun during the run on the target. The crossing was only half accomplished when Kidder turned and yelled back to him. "The bombardier's hit, boy. Call up to the captain. Here, give me a hand."

Kidder was pulling Bombardier Hall from above his American bombsight, an instrument to which his now-dead hands still clung. They had to break his hold, then drag him back into the gangway. Navigator Daniels bore a hand, then put himself forward, machine-gun in hand, into the dead man's seat. And hell went right ahead proving that it sure beats the devil how hell and the killing business keeps up.

Sergeant Ballard, top-turret gunner, was the next to get it. Fact is, he was slithering, limp and dead, from his overhead spot even before they had Bombardier Hall dragged clear of the gangway.

Sergeant White said, "I'll take that," and started upward for the turret control just relinquished by the dead. Yates took over at the starboard waist gun where White had been.

Yates was hardly in position before the ship shook from bow to rudder. At the exact moment, "The Slave Driver" was in a cloud of acrid smoke. Colonel Haslip—on the interphone—asked, "What's that? What hit?"

A moment later, having stepped forward a bit, Nevada answered. He said, "The top turret's gone, sir. Guns and all. Sergeant White went, too. There's just a hole in the crown."

For a moment then, "The Slave Driver" broke from the tossing, burst-blasted smoke and rode in the clear. General Canijory pointed, wordlessly, across Haslip's chest and through a fore window. The colonel glanced that way, then said, "Oh, my—oh!"

Two Forts had been blast-tossed together, locked, and the left wing tip of one was knifing its way up into the open bomb-bay doors of the other. The outer portside propeller of the lower ship was already grinding, blade to blade, with the inside starboard propeller of the higher ship, then those mighty air screws struck live fuel and the combined wreckage was falling as one ball of fire.

A F-W-190 came directly through the place in the smoke where those two ships had been. The Hun pilot, guns open, saw "The Slave Driver" just too late. He tried to zoom. Kidder and Daniels were both fast. They blew that 190 into a red, misshapen blob just as it hit the tip of their own Fort's left wing, but it hit! There was

a jar and that crunching metallic grind, then "The Slave Driver" seemed to shake itself loose from what was left of that crazy enemy ship. But a full three feet of wing-tip was gone. Quickly then, Colonel Haslip trimmed his controls, interphoned to his rear cabin men, and ordered a shift to starboard for all movable weight. So, working like mad—with the aid of a general who had moved aft—the waist gunners—Nevada, Yates and Murphy—bucked freight and moved spare guns, ammunition, kits, fire extinguishers and all other racked or bracketed items of weight. Colonel Haslip phoned again and said, "That does it. On your guns! Here's hell!"

There was no end of hell. But there was a given width to Helgoland, and Haslip finally saw the east coastline just below his nose. There were other Forts on a company front with him. He didn't dare to try to count them. Perhaps he was afraid even to try. He knew the trick names of a hundred Forts—especially those of his own immediate group—and he didn't want to look and find them missing now. Certain ships should be close, maybe they wouldn't be there.

But there was no time for that, anyway. "The Slave Driver" wasn't out of the woods, though she and these other near ships had made their run and were now out of the heaviest of the flak and clear of the worst of the tossing battle smoke.

Moving forward again, General Canijory stopped for a word with Mary Trimshippe, just for a moment.

"You still up, young lady?" he asked, popping his head within the navigator's recess. "What's the matter—can't you sleep?"

"Never again, General," Mary Trimshippe said, and she wasn't fooling. "I don't think I'll ever sleep again. This, oh that—it was awful! Oh, our Forts, our boys! I saw them, I saw them go. Burning! Torn to pieces! Are we all right? Is——?"

"He is," General Canijory said. "And we are. Don't get up, girl. Don't go back there. We should win through now."

The general stepped ahead to his right-side seat. Mary Trimshippe held to her now-cramped drop seat. She knew by now that she wasn't brave, that this wasn't the thing a girl really wants. But, more than ever, she was sure of the thing she needed most, and that was all right, for the general had said so. Yes, General Canijory had said, "He is," and that, for the time being, was enough.

VIII

ABOUT midway of the thirty-mile distance between Helgoland and the Schleswig-Holstein shore, Colonel Haslip's entire combined groups once more came to rendezvous, as per flight orders. Where hundreds of ships had come up from the English dispersal area, hundreds were due to start back. But hardly half as many hundreds as on the outbound trip. Again, Haslip and General Canijory hesitated to count. But when the terrible limping wreckage—many of them on only three motors, some just on two, and one hard-hit Fort trying to stay aloft on a single inside right engine—was all clear of the flak field, Haslip turned to the general and said, "Sir, it looks like a forty or fifty per cent loss."

"It does," Canijory agreed. "Lord, what a price! But what a piece of work, Colonel." He was gazing aft—back toward where the wreckage of endless other flights was coming out of the smoke bank—and he added, "There's not so much flak now. Maybe the cost wasn't too high. I think we've put down the fires of the famed island. I think Helgoland is being neutralized according to plan. Yes"—and his eyes were still back there—"I feel certain it is taking more than any like area can absorb.

"Well, are we all out? We can't rest here."

"I'll turn it over to Major Peel, sir," Colonel Haslip said. Then he went out to his entire command, via the ship-to-ship phone.

"Major Peel will lead the parade home," he ordered. "Good luck to you men." General Canijory had unclipped a sheet of paper from his knee-pad. He passed it to Haslip. These were the numbers of the special gun ships.

"The following ships," Haslip then radiophoned, "will carry on with Mission 3."

Slowly then, he read off the numbers of eleven Forts; and as he did so, both he and Canijory watched the great, limping swarm for results. Six ships quit the formations and moved out front, to the east. Six of eleven expected! But two of the six were

now on three motors. It took no time at all for Colonel Haslip to turn them back.

"You lame ducks, you men trying to save fuel for Uncle Sam, get gone for home. And lighten ship. Everything and anything is expendable. And that goes for all damaged craft. Get yourself home, and to hell with the bill. That's an order!"

The main body, now taking orders from Major Peel, bore off to the left. He'd take them back across the North Sea via a well-offshore course, well out to sea beyond any danger of further punishment by enemy shore-based fighter craft. Colonel Haslip, with the four gun ships working in on his rear, swung right, southward, into that hot corner of the North Sea where the defenses of the vital, strategical Elbe estuary awaited them.

Even as they turned that way, General Canijory gave Haslip a chance for a choice, an easy out if the colonel wanted it.

"With this wingtip gone," he said, "you have every right to turn back if you think it wisest."

"But I have four good motors, sir," Haslip said. "She's still fully airworthy, that left aileron is okay, and the lateral trim seems just about normal. Lord, sir, the old 'Slave Driver' wouldn't quit now. She can take it as well as she can hand it out. Yes, sir; even when the whip's on her."

The whip was on her again all too soon. Haslip had started to take his five-ship group down to earth just as soon as the south turn had been made; and in short order they had coasted away a full twenty thousand feet of fall. Then, for a while, he had cruised landward at about 12,000 feet, just getting a line on the shore ahead. The Elbe end of the Kiel Canal was only a few miles off his left wing; but there was nothing much there to attract his attention or promise anything in the line of hidden enemy fighter fields. The Kiel area had been worked over from end to end, and not even the Hun would be stupid enough to base fighter craft anywhere in the immediate vicinity. Burning Bremerhaven was on his right, and burnt-out Hamburg was a gray smudge—flashing a few remaining panes of glass in the afternoon sun—some fifty-odd miles out front.

Despite all the working over, regardless of the great hulk of ruin, the Elve Valley would be vital as long as there was a Berlin, for the Elbe leads in close to the black heart of Germany.

TWENTY Hun fighter planes came up out of no place and struck almost without warning, though a belly gunner on one of the other Forts was reaching out for them long before the rest of the group realized what was happening. These were fast-climbing ships, they had to be to come out of no-place like that.

"Heinkels!" Sergeant Yates sang out, and there was no need of using the phone when a man had a voice like that.

"Heinkel-112s!" Colonel Haslip sang back. "Old babies, but plenty nasty! Give 'em hell!"

There was hell a-poppin', but the fire power of five Forts, now in horizontal star-formation flight, was just a little too much for the under-gunned, cannonless Heinkel-112. There was just that one desperate attack, one hellish flurry of tracers, and seven of the twenty Huns were on their way groundward. The others were dogging it, but flying wide of any more such quick checking-off. Wide as they flew, the mighty fire power of the Forts reached out for them.

"There's one for me!" "Stub" Standhope phoned in from the belly turret.

"Ye gods!" Colonel Haslip said. "The forgotten man! How have things been going with you, Stub?"

"Swell, sir. Got me three while we were over the target. Hey, sir, wasn't anybody else keeping my score?"

"'Fraid not," Haslip said.

"Then I got four or five, sir," Stub lied like a gent.

One of the other Forts had reached a too-close Heinkel while Stub was correcting and checking his aerial Crosley rating. Then the eleven remaining enemy fighters went very yellow and belied the word fighter, for they no longer were. Truth is, they were hardly a nuisance.

"Hell, sir," Colonel Haslip said, "we don't want these damned dopes following us. How are we going to learn anything with a mob like this sounding off with a warning?"

"Right you be," said Canijory. "Say, we've made a new first in aerial warfare. It's the first time that enemy fighter craft

fell lower than pilot fish. The pilot fish never bother or betray the whale. Now what the devil are we to do?"

"They're good for 358 per hour, so we can't shag 'em," the colonel lamented. "They are thick-skinned Hitler children, so we can't shame them off. We have the ship-to-ship phone, and I know some German, but to beg I am too proud."

"Hell's bells, make 'em a price," the general said. "Ten to one, they'll take any offer at this stage of the war. Go ahead, promise them a prison camp on Times Square, or even out in good old Hollywood."

IX

IT TOOK nearly an hour to shoot off four more of those dogging Heinkels, and, in the end, discourage the few that remained. In so doing, "The Slave Driver" toured the Elbe Valley almost as far southeast as the Havel. By that time, Berlin itself was in view. During that valley sweep, Haslip brought his well-flown star formation right down above the hills, and at times only scant feet above the river, this maneuver to reduce the Hun attack sphere by half and hold the nuisance-value Heinkels above the Forts.

Being way down there, the formation, in its long-drawn-out, running fight, located two enemy air fields. But neither was of the hidden variety. Instead, they were fine setups for a quick taking. Better still, they were of wooden construction, wartime dromes of large shops, great warehouses and long strings of wide-doored hangars. And, in each case, both fields were fairly devoid of aircraft. No doubt their fighting ships were out over mighty Helgoland—or under the waters around same.

"The Slave Driver" & Co., coming down on these dromes, disregarded the few remaining Heinkels and unloaded their only bomb cargoes—those long, thin incendiary sticks. They packed plenty of such fire bombs, and by the time they had passed east and west through the ack-ack defenses of the second Hun field, there were fewer hangars and shops left for Luftwaffe usage. Also, there were two Forts fewer; and it was a small, tight V formation that then took the three still-flying big ships back along the green shores of the Elbe.

"You pay and pay and pay," General Canijory remarked to Haslip. "Lord, oh Lord, wait till the old uncle picks up the check for this party!"

Back in the small cubby where the Trimshippe lady still sat, Corporal Nevada Anderson was taking a moment's breather.

"Well, Mary," he tried to kid, "as the old army enlisted stiffs always tell the recruits: It goes like this for a while, then it gets worse."

"It can't get much worse, big boy," Mary Trimshippe said. "Look—only three of us left. I'm afraid. I'm not ashamed to say it. I'm afraid."

"You and me both," Nevada agreed, though he was, perhaps, only trying to comfort the girl. He didn't appear to be afraid. This was the thing he had wanted, and the high color in the lank, slabsided cowhand's face told you that this was his meat. "But we'll ride this thing out, Mary. We have a good man up front, two or three good men out front."

"All the other ships had good men, too," Mary Trimshippe reminded Nevada. "Didn't they?"

"Every one," Nevada agreed. "But their numbers were up, Mary. It has to come to some, you know, and others never——"

Nevada never finished that supposedly comforting bit of conversation. The recoil of all guns was tin-panning through the entire ship, and he was stepping rearward to the waist bay once more.

It was a group of attack bombers this time —seven of them. They were two-engined craft, and, for a short spell, even Haslip couldn't identify them. Then he even took time out for a short laugh. Canijory turned and stared at the colonel, thinking that the pilot had started to crack up.

"They're Italian Breda-88s, sir," he said. "See the insignia. Good Lord, have they stripped the silent pardner! Bredas. Not too good. Pretty ancient."

Then the going got pretty hot in spite of the fact that a Breda-88 wasn't rated among the hottest of the hot ships. The group of seven came down the air in line; and when they raked the three Forts they had the getaway speed of the long, hard dive behind them. But the Yank fire power began picking them off a good five hundred yards before their own bow guns were able to reach

the Forts with the first bursts of scattered tracers. Three of the Breda-88s took direct hits even before they had pulled up into the get-away zoom. A fourth turned aside in flame. But the three others, taking a chance on clipping the two rear, outside Flying Fortresses, made the getaway, and scored.

Glancing left, back toward Lieutenant Patch's "Whipping Boy," Colonel Haslip could see that its plastic greenhouse nose had been all but blasted away. Somebody was working his way down into what was left of the bombardier's spot. Then the bombardier and his side-by-side gunner were being pulled back and up.

"Two men gone there, sir," Haslip told the general, and then the interphone was buzzing for Haslip's attention.

"This is Standhope, sir," Stub said. "I think maybe you'd best tell Captain Marinella that he has a dead man in the belly turret of his 'Little Flower.' See him, sir? That ship's cut almost in halves, what I mean. Gee, sir, you could almost tear on the perforated line."

Before Colonel Haslip could radiophone Captain Marinella, Death ripped on the machine-gun-perforated line. The "Little Flower" buckled just about at the narrow of the tail, on a dotted line that passed right through the belly turret.

Still gazing down and back to the right—off to where the twisted wreckage had gone into trees—General Canijory said, "I saw it, so I'll believe it, but I'll be damned, Colonel Haslip, if it won't be easy for anybody to convince me that that couldn't happen. A Breda-88's gunfire cutting a Fort in halves!"

Hamburg's ashes and the wider Elbe estuary were just ahead when that bit of Breda-made hell had passed. Off to the right was an extensive north-plains forest. It was one of those government planned, man-planted forests of Scotch pine, heavy of foliage, well-grown with age and black-green of color. General Canijory found himself studying that passing green sea.

"It looks just like forest," he remarked, "and nothing more." The general, perhaps, was just talking to forget the "Little Flower."

"We could swing off in that direction," Haslip said. "Up till now, we haven't earned our keep, sir. Lord, trimmed down to two ships, and the Air support Command back there still waiting to hear from us! Yes, I'd say it's just as represented—all forest."

"There's a few open spots," Canijory remarked, pointing ahead and to the left. "Too small for runways, though. There's stock on them—sheep, I'd say. Guess they are just small farms."

Haslip studied his clock for a moment, then glanced at his strip map. "We're just about 800 miles out on this trip, sir," he said.

"Time I took the controls for a spell," the general said. "You get aft and stretch a leg. Nothing's going to happen back over this forestland. Okay, I've got it."

X

GENERAL CANIJORY, having taken "The Slave Driver" in hand, radiophoned the purpose of the change of flying direction to Lieutenant Patch and his "Whipping Boy" crew.

"We're going to take a look at this formal-garden forest over here," he said. "Have all hands peel the eye and see what they can see. Maybe it's a wild-goose chase. Then again, well, maybe we'll scare up something worthwhile. If we should scare up something in the line of ack-ack, and if you're the last ship left in this action, see to it that you radio this position to Air Support Command. Then get to hell gone for home! We're 800 miles out, you know."

Back in the waist gunners' bay, Colonel Haslip stopped to gaze down through Sergeant Yates' side opening. For the time being, Nevada Anderson was policing spent shells and belt rings from underfoot.

"The kid's just naturally a neat housekeeper, sir," Yates remarked. "Guess it's the way I brung him up."

"Better let the housekeeping go, we're riding pretty just now, men, but we're not out of the woods—to recoin a hell of an old saying. We're taking a look at this forest. There's a short beer in it for anybody locating something more than sheep."

"Sheep! Don't say 'sheep' to this here wild-an'-woolly cowhand, suh," Sergeant Yates begged. "He goes nuts when he even hears tell of sheep."

"Did you say there were sheep down there, sir?" Nevada put in. "What the hell

kind—tree-going sheep? Looks like all solid forest to me. I was just saying so to Murphy."

Haslip pointed down. They were only a few thousand feet above ground. "There's sheep now—in that clearing."

"Sheep is right," said Nevada. He studied the clearing, and, disgusting as it was to a cowhand, he studied the sheep. Then he said, "There's a good hundred sheep there. And there's more black sheep to that bunch than there should be. What's more, there's hell'n'gone more sheep to the square acre on that clearing than there should be to the square mile on real range country."

"Sir," Yates said, "the old cowhand sees something."

"There's no green stuff where those sheep are," Nevada went on. "Hell, sir, they're not dummy stock like Yates had me ridin' herd on. Those sheep've been grazing, but not on that limited acreage. Maybe that forest isn't all trees. Or maybe we can't see whatever it is because of the trees—how about phony trees?"

"Camouflage!" Haslip exclaimed. "But I can't see any signs of it. Could it be a perfect job?"

"You'll have to ask somebody smarter than I am about that," Nevada answered. "But I'll still bet that that pack of baa-baas are grazing some ground close to where they are standing so contentedly. You've got to keep those woollies on the eats all the time, you know. Hell, they have endless guts—or empty legs, or something."

"And I think we have something," said Colonel Haslip. "Maybe we'd better give that nearby forest a working over with Machine-gun fire or incendiary sticks, eh what?"

"I'll bet you'll maybe scare up something besides long-whiskered, dirty sheepherders," Nevada said. "And there don't seem to be any of said sheepherders, nor dogs either; and that there's very damned funny. Say, those sheep could be just lawnmowers!"

"Lawnmowers?" Haslip repeated. "How do you mean?"

"Like they have sheep out in Golden Gate Park," Nevada reminded Haslip. "They graze 'em on the big lawns out there. They could be using this pack to keep a flying strip clear of tall growth, and what I mean, sheep'll sure'n hell do that.

"I'd like to make a suggestion, sir."

"Suggestion—hell," said Haslip. "Make it an order."

"Let's put a burst of slugs in among those baa-baas and see which way they break. They are dumb damned things and they'll break for the open instead of hi-tailing for cover. Where they go, the grazing ground is."

The ship was well east of the open space wherein the sheep were bunched. So Haslip said, "I'll do a turn of the clearing and you throw a burst down there, Corporal. We'll fly her wide. We don't want to have them tossing any sudden flak straight up at us."

GETTING back to the pilots' bay, Haslip explained the piece of business to General Canijory, then took over. First, he gave the other Fort its wing-wag signal to carry on and keep clear. It was no time or place for intership radiophone conversation—not if that forest housed one or more enemy air fields.

Colonel Haslip flew the wide circle in such a way as to put the clearing under the fire of "The Slave Driver's" port-side guns.

"You shoot the dam' old sheep, kid," Gunner Murphy said, relinquishing his gun to Nevada. "It's your idea. Hell, guy, I never killed anything in my life—till I got my first chance at the Hun grunts."

When the big wide wings were in nice *revage,* then heading east once more, Nevada brought the sheep pack into his ring-sight and squeezed out a sharp, short burst. Half a dozen sheep dropped. The others milled like mad for a few terrified seconds, then bolted through what, to the aerial eye, looked like a solid green bank of low pine bows.

You couldn't see exactly where they had gone. There was no occasional glimpses of sheep darting among the trees. The green coverage was too solid for that. Truth is, it was too solid for anything. But the Fort's watchers knew now where the grazing ground must be.

"The corporal, sir, knows his sheep," Colonel Haslip said.

"Who is he?" General Canijory asked.

"A new crewman. Name is Anderson, Nevada Anderson," Colonel Haslip stated. "We have a terrific gunners' pool, sir. Boys with the old know-how, guts, and what it calls for."

XI

FOR a good five miles then, "The Slave Driver" cruised eastward at increased speed. In short order, Colonel Haslip had the "Whipping Boy" close at hand. Both ships were taking on altitude again. Finally, Haslip chanced a few words of radiophone with Lieutenant Patch.

"You keep abreast of us, Lieutenant," he said. "Keep about a flying-strip's width away from us. Get it? And do as we do when we do it. I hope your big belly doors are all ready to open and that the fire sticks are all set for dropping—if you get what I mean."

"I think I do, and they are," Patch answered. Then both ships began to fly the turnabout. They were at seven thousand feet.

After that, there was no more conversation on the two-way radiophone. The "Whipping Boy" was about a city block to the right and its bomb-bay doors were down. And somebody was on the bomb-dropping controls in the shattered nose of that ship. It was ready.

"The Slave Driver" was all set, too. Daniels had replaced the dead Bombardier Hall above the great American bombsight, and Air Marshal Kidder—with the old horseface all interest—was still out front paying close attention to the instrument he claimed not to believe.

When the sheep clearing came just about abreast, Haslip spoke to Daniels.

"You may drop 'em when you're ready, Mr. Gridley!" he said.

Daniels began to drop a pattern of fire sticks down through a bank of trees that lined what should be the strip into which the sheep had plunged so wildly. On the far side of that same chosen stripe, the "Whipping Boy" was doing likewise. And both ships went entirely through a full mile of that run without bringing anything up from among those trees—not even a wisp of smoke.

Turning wide—a good two miles west of the operations—the crews then studied that place where nothing had happened. For a time, it looked like so much labor lost. Then something blew!

It must have been a Hun cache of hi-octaine fuel; for when it blew, it sure did blow! And the air above the forest was litter-filled, smokepacked and flame-torn. Whole sections of the great green camouflage nets were soon afire; and those not yet afire were being hauled back out of danger. The scene was alive with hundreds of gray-green Nazis, guys suddenly and crudely uncovered. In no time at all, a half-mile-long, block-wide flying strip had been exposed to aerial view. And the sheep, still out of control, bolted here, there and everywhere, adding nicely to the confusion.

"We'll put it in code," General Canijory said, and as he spoke, he was making the first jottings of his report on the knee-pad's scratch sheet. Haslip called Radioman Lasky up from his nose-bay gun position, then ordered him to break out the Air Support Command code book.

"The general will have a message in a few minutes," he said. "You can start reaching out for the Air Support Command's Point-of-Control ship. It's a destroyer someplace off the Dutch coast. Guess you can bring that distance in, eh?"

Radioman Lasky said he could—bring in the PC aboard a destroyer in the North Sea—and he had rapped out the call signal by the time General Canijory had the first sheet of paper ready for the coding.

MEANWHILE, "The Slave Driver" and the "Whipping Boy" went into a great circle of the forest land. This particular forest afire embraced perhaps twenty square miles of Scotch pine; and a little to the east and northeast there were two other man-made green blocks that were government stands, too. Colonel Haslip decided to fly a turn around the whole area, just for a good look-see, for each of the other two woodlands showed clearings. And, on closer view, sheep were to be seen bunched therein.

"Hun fighter ships! Swarms of the bloody things!" Tail Gunner Stinger Ray suddenly announced. "They're comin' this way. Comin' down from over Helgoland way. Gee, hundreds of 'em!"

There were hundreds of them. Being so warned, Haslip gave the "Whipping Boy" a wing-wag signal, then both ships went just a bit deeper into the east. Circling then, they watched the Hun small craft come back to the most westerly of the forests. And when the first of the ships reached the fire

scene, they just circled. Some Hun pilots were without a home.

After a time, however, the circlers winged further east with the planes of other returning groups, but these, too, were put to the circling. No camouflage nets had been pulled aside for them.

Chances are, the ground forces of those hidden fields had radiophoned the circlers that the enemy Forts were in the vicinity. Of a sudden, all eyes aboard the two Forts saw certain Hun fighters quit the circling and start their way.

"The ships," Haslip warned his gunmen, "won't have much fuel left. Chances are, they're just about washed up on ammunition, too. So give 'em hell, and we'll stay." He phoned that idea across to the "Whipping Boy," too.

AND the Hun Messers and Wulfs came in, but they were just trying to run a numerical bluff on the Yanks. Said Yanks weren't going to be bluffed at all. Instead, the Forts' bow guns were throwing stuff in among the Huns long before those fighters were close enough to toss anything in return.

And they tossed very little in return, at that. Haslip was correct. He had sized up the setup to the cat's thin, red hair of exactness: the Hun was out of machine-gun fodder.

That is, he was for the greater part. But one Messer managed to get in close enough to the "Whipping Boy" to shoot his wad before he, in turn, was burned down by direct cannon hit from the "Whipping Boy's" top turret. When that bit of gunplay was over, Lieutenant Patch had one dead waist gunner, port-side, and only three motors. There was other damage aboard that ship, too.

"Cut it for home, Lieutenant," Colonel Haslip ordered. "Make that ship as light as possible as you go. Dump everything that weighs more than nothing. You have some dead boys aboard. Put chutes on them and send them down. We'll have to depend on the enemy to take care of them till this is over. Bail 'em out. And good-by."

"Good-by," Lieutenant Patch answered. "But you'd better look right now, sir. I think you have a dead man in your belly turret."

XII

WHILE the "Whipping Boy" started northwestward back to the North Sea crossing, "The Slave Driver" took on more and more altitude, till 10,000 was on the altimeter. A few Hun fighters were still buzzing around, but most of them had cut away and returned to the frantic search for a landing spot. Fact is, some were already going down—dead stick—into the trees. A few had even taken the long chance and went in on the burning field.

Haslip, for his part, was inviting a tough ending by dallying in that neighborhood. These hidden fields would by now have phoned other commands for fighter aid.

"I figure we'd better see this through, sir," he said in Canijory, just after the latter had passed Radioman Lasky a second slip of paper. "We've come a long way, and it's a long way back, so we might as well hold tight till the Air Support Command has time to get its attack-bomber flights into this neck of the woods."

"What have we to lose?" the general kidded. "Anyway, by buzzing about up here, we're keeping the covers drawn on these other hidden fields. Lord, man—look! Three Focke-Wulfs going into those trees, now, and all at the same time. Crashing. Why, what the devil, you can't destroy them that fast with gunfire; and it's an easy odds-on bet that the Luftwaffe can't get new ones that fast from the factories. So this is all profit for us.

"I'll stretch a leg and see how they're coming with the belly-turret gunner. Poor little devil!"

When General Canijory stopped to ask Mary Trimshippe how things looked now, the lady was writing.

"I'm just making the movements, General," she said. "For a fact, I never want to send this picture back to the folks at home. Maybe I'm just a softy. Maybe this is a woman's work, but I'm not the woman. Will be starting back soon?"

"It won't be long now," the general said. "You've been okay, young lady. Go ahead and write. I'll let you know when there's an opening on a gun. Maybe that's what you need."

Coming into the gunners' bay, the general gazed down on three dead men who had

been carefully placed—just by way of helping the ship's trim—close in along the right wall. That was a tough eyeful, even for an old-line army man.

Sergeant Yates and Murphy were alone in the waist-gun bay, each at a gun.

"Who's Anderson—the sheep detector?" he asked.

Yates pointed through the floor. "He's manning the belly turret, sir. The kid was a pretty tight fit, but we folded him in. Nevada says his legs were just made for that kind of gold-fish-bowl curvin.' On him, sir, the form-fittin' bay window looks good. That's one hell of a trooper, sir."

The general got clubby. He stood close to Yates, dropped his voice very low, then asked, "He's No. 1 boy with the lady, isn't he?"

"An' how, sir," said old Yates. "But the young dope don't do himself no good. You know how it is; the kid takes that stuff serious. The Trim Ship—beg pardon, but that's what the gang back on the paint farm used to call her—the Trimshippe girl is way up on a pedestal, as far as the Nevada boy is concerned."

"That's bad," said the general.

"Dam' tootin', sir. That's no dice. A soldier's gotta get 'em off the high hoss before he can really go to town. Take it from me, that gal's regular. A guy with a head could make a sweet baby out of her."

"Too bad you haven't got the time," Canijory kidded.

"Me? Hell no, sir. Like the colored gals down old San Antonio way say—'Soldier, you-all stick to yore color an' Ah'll stick to mine.' Me, General, I know my place—an' my speed, too."

General Canijory turned away from Yates; and then he was gazing at the dead men again. Without asking for help, without taking Yates or Murphy away from their guns, he secured parachutes and strapped each dead man into a harness. Then he went forward.

Murphy looked at the dead men, then over at Yates; and old Yates was gazing at Murphy, too.

"What was the idea of that?" Yates asked. "M'gosh, dead men don't jump chutes. Or do they?"

"I'm not so sure," Murphy answered. "When the 'Whipping Boy' pulled away from us—that is, when it was almost out of sight—I thought I saw three chutes open. Maybe I was screwy."

"Guess maybe you're gettin' a bit punchy, Murph,'" Yates agreed. "Let's see. You said this was your forty-second mission with this old death ship, didn't you? Yep, you've got a right to be walkin' on your heels."

Murphy said, "We'll be walking on water, Yates, if the boss doesn't call off this Cook's tour and head for home. Hell, I don't mind seeing Germany coming and going, but this thing of sticking around looking under the rugs and behind the pictures on the wall is something else again. Do you know that we're better than five hours out?"

"And that means five hours—or almost five hours—going back," Yates added. "And it could even add up higher than that."

THE ship was at 12,000 feet and well north of the forest that now seemed to have all its once-hidden hangars and shops brightly aflame. Then Murphy spoke the rest of his piece.

"Damned if I can figure the boss," he said. "We're working off toward the Lubeck-Rostock-Stettin line, and, brother, there is hell and plenty for anybody that wants to get up in that neck of the woods in bread daylight. Eh-eh! Do you see what I see?"

"Enemy ships at two o'clock, north and east!" Murphy was barking into the interphone; and at the same time the same warning was coming forward from Stinger Ray in the tail position.

Haslip had been headed south at the time. He flew a quick *verage* turn and faced north. Enemy ships was right! A skyful of them, and all fighters.

"I'll be damned," Haslip remarked to his co-pilot high-ranker, "I didn't suppose Herman had this many ships left. Maybe he won't even spend the last of his gang on Helgoland, or on any other one spot. But say, they're not heading for us."

"No, they're not. They're angling away to the west," General Canijory agreed. "Dammit, is there a chance that they've intercepted and decoded our call to the Air Support Command?"

"There's always that chance," Haslip said. "But just a shake, sir! Here comes that command! Look at that nasty mess of Bostons,

Marauders, Mitchells, Mosquitoes, Beaufighters and what the hell have you!

"Oh, say—what are we doing here? We have got to go back and show them in. Lord, sir, we want to see this fight. I always wanted to sit in and watch a good air battle."

XIII

IT WAS the exact place for a man who wanted to see an air battle. So "The Slave Driver" was once more cruising southward toward the fire in the dark green forest; and, as they closed down on the scene, General Canijory was radiophoning directions, hints and orders to the incoming Air Support Commands flight leaders.

And just about the time his instructions struck the earphones of those newcomers, the Hun swarms out of the northeast struck the Yanks. But the world-beating collection of tip-top hot ships took the storm in stride. After all, each of those two-motored American and English jobs was manned by from three to six good men, and, in times of battle, the co-pilot was the only one not likely to be throwing lead. In the first clash, Allied fire power hit like a ton of brick dumped on a kid's toy battle field.

For a brief spell the awful sight even caused General Canijory to cut off his radiophoning and sit there awed and wordless. Then, feeling swell and certain that these Allies could handle the mob, he spoke his final hints.

"We took care of the drome that is burning. You men can go in and work it over just for practice, if you feel that way," he suggested. "But we have cause to believe that you can uncover new and better targets in just about any of these ready-made forests hereabout. Look for small clearings in the forests. If there're sheep in the clearings, then there should be a drome within a few yards of said sheep." For a time then, the general watched the first formation of Marauders going in on the already-fired location. There was a cover of flak above the place now. But Marauders like flak.

"That's another way you'll know where they are," Canijory said. "Yes, sir, you men will meet plenty of flak. These hidden fields are important in the Hun plan to protect the march on Berlin. Well, good luck to you. Guess we-uns be goin' home now."

Haslip, grinning as the general said that good-by, agreed. He said, "It's high time we cut for home, sir. There's such a thing as running a man's luck into the ground. We wouldn't want to do that."

For a long time then, until distance took the sight from their view, all aboard "The Slave Driver" gazed aft and watched Hun fighters going down under Allied guns. Also, before they were too far for visibility, they saw new smoke clouds coming up from four more localities in the tree country.

"That makes five," Canijory remarked. "I'm surprised at that. I figured there might be about three. Say, your ol' cowhand sure made a strike. By the way, the cowhand is in your bottom turret now."

"No!" Haslip exclaimed. "Why, the man's too long for that globe."

"Where there's a will—you know," the general reminded the colonel. "The other waist gunners say they had to put him in then stamp him down. It was what he wanted, they said."

"*One* of the things he wants," Colonel Haslip emphasized, bobbing his head back toward Mary Trimshippe. "According to a little warning given me by our Captain Case," Canijory mused, "but where's the hitch?"

"Her uncle, the late General Repap," said Haslip, "couldn't see the young—well, sir, you know. He's an enlisted man."

"To hell with that stuff! Those days are gone forever," said Canijory. "Enlisted man! Maybe you've noticed, Mr. Haslip, that the enlisted men in this war—especially in this Air Forces branch—are collecting the largest and very best of chest medals. Let's see. Don't we have a Sergeant Smith standing K.P. with the Congressional Medal of Honor on his chest?"

"I've heard tell," grinned Haslip. "An incongruity, sir."

For a few miles and minutes then, General Canijory studied the wide waters of the lower Elbe; and the northwestward visibility ended just about where Helgoland's pile of smoke stood high against the low sun.

"It's still under heavy attack," the general said. "And until we cross this coastline, we won't be free from that danger."

"And not after we cross it, either," Haslip answered. "I don't see how we ride as

free and leisurely as we're doing now, for that matter. This is the old coffin corner—this Kiel-canal-approach area. But I'll breathe easier when we get out to sea."

"Then whereaway?" Canijory asked.

"We'll be ultra conservative. We'll keep well east of Helgoland, run up almost to the Danish coast, then cut for home well out over the sea—I think"—and Haslip had raised a pointing finger toward the horizon—"we have a cloudbank making up, 'way up there, west of the North Frisians. It would be nice to make a westward run restfully and safely tucked away in a cloudbank."

"I think you've earned one GI cloudbank," General Canijory agreed. "Truth is, I think the entire crew has earned a silver-lined cloudbank. All except myself. I've just been what you might call a riding supernumerary. However, if *you* call me that, Mr. Haslip, I'll see that you get a black mark. So don't forget that you're in line for a generalship."

"That's news," Haslip said, with wonder and surprise. "And I'll be damned, sir, if I don't try to get us safely home."

BUT it wasn't going to be that easy. The shell that had been Hamburg was well behind them, and the coastline at Cuxhaven just ahead, but "The Slave Driver" was riding through ack-ack bursts again. There was nothing to be gained by trying to dodge, and no hopes of winning altitude fast enough to outride that flak, so Colonel Haslip took what to him seemed the only out—full power, a nose shoved down, and a big ship roaring earthward toward the wide waters at the Elbe's mouth.

But the Fort was being splattered by fragmentations, and General Canijory, for just a second, fell against Haslip. All panes on the general's side of the cabin were gone. Glass was tinkling down from the electrical-control board overhead, and there was blood on the high-ranker's right cheek.

He said, "I'm just creased. Carry on. I'm okay."

Haslip could see that his nose greenhouse had been hit again, then Air Marshal Kidder was on the interphone. He said, "Our Mr. Daniels has had it, Colonel Haslip. And the wireless chap too. I'm really in quite a mess here."

General Canijory was pulling a flying scarf tightly around his neck. The scarf was bloody. So were his hands.

He said, "I'll go forward and see what I can do for Kidder—if I can make it. Damned if Kidder isn't hard to get! The fellow must lead a charmed life. Damned blood!"

When the general made his way forward and down into the badly-shattered bombardier's nose, Kidder was sitting in what looked like the wreckage of a butcher shop. Everything was blood and guts.

"Get yourself out of that!" Canijory ordered. He reached ahead and began to help the air marshal, but the tall horsefaced one seemed more or less helpless. "What's wrong, marshal?"

"I've had it, too, Canijory old man," Kidder said. "Just a bit of a bash on the left hip. Oh, I'll get out all right."

THE general took a close look at what was left of two men—Daniels and Lasky—and there seemed to be nothing very definite about either. Just a few arms, part of a lower leg, no heads or complete torsos, and—and the man began pushing the entire mess through the shattered openings in the lower rim of the plastic globe.

"There's nothing left by which to identify them," he said, "and this way is cleaner. The waters a damned clean burial."

"Right-o, sir," Kidder agreed; and he, too, scraped and scratched till the place was free of its dead.

"Here, let me give you a hand. Let's go," Canijory urged, and then the two men helped each other back and up.

They staggered aft till General Canijory had eased Kidder into Radioman Lasky's former seat, just opposite Mary Trimshippe. And the lady gazed across, wide-eyed with fear and sudden surprise.

"Don't look, Miss Trimshippe," the general urged. "But you might break out a first-aid kit for us."

"Don't look! I'll look," Mary Trimshippe almost yelled. Then she was on her feet. And she knew where the first-aid kit was. And she knew how to use one. And the first thing she brought to hand was the hypodermic syringe and the morphine.

Kidder was minus a good part of his left hip, say nothing of much damage to the

upper leg. But the man was tough, and he used the needle himself, and he wrapped the hip and leg with his own hands, then he tried to stand and said he was fit as a fiddle and ready for more fight. He was wobbly, but he fought and stood.

Bracing himself and standing there in the narrow freeway, he helped Mary with the general. But the general wasn't merely creased.

It was deeper than that. The blood wouldn't stop flowing. And the man had a hard time of it trying to retain consciousness. In the end, Air Marshal Kidder had to be blunt.

He said, "Canijory old man, I'm afraid your jugular's been opened. Lord, what are we to do? One cannot put a tourniquet on a chap's throat. It'd make him so red in the face, eh what?"

"Yes, dammit," said the general. "And he'll be white in the face if the flow isn't stopped. All right! All right! I can't fly back across 400 miles of sea. I wouldn't last two hours, and you don't have to tell me that. I need a hospital, nothing else.

"O.K., Miss Trimshippe. Put away your stuff. You've been sweet, young lady. Now help me with a chute."

"A parachute!" Kidder exclaimed. "You intended to—"

"That's it, Marshal. I wouldn't hesitate to send down an enlisted man, nor a junior officer, and I can send myself.

"Colonel Haslip," he then stepped forward to sing out, "I'm leaving you. Put me inshore, any place, near a town or city if one's handy. Good-by and good luck!"

Haslip turned and stared aft. His eyes were on the red-wet bandage at Canijory's throat—the red-wet bandage that was doing little or no good. Haslip didn't have to be told.

In forty-odd aerial battle missions he had seen enough of this to know when the signs were bad.

"Could the general hold out till we cross the Danish coast—about sixty miles more, sir?" he asked.

"That'd be better," the general agreed. "I'll take a chance. The Danes have been stiff-backed. Maybe they'll refuse to turn me over to the enemy. Yes, we'll chance that. Let me know. I'll be aft at the unloading door."

XIV

NOT more than fifteen miles to port, Helgoland's tower of black smoke was rising twenty thousand feet into the air. What was to go down as the war's longest sustained aerial attack was still under full, all-out action. Now, as the crew of "The Slave Driver" watched from their three-thousand-foot altitude, they could see flight after flight of Forts, Wellingtons, Halifaxes and Lancasters come through and ride in the clear for rendezvous—just as that first Flying Fortress group had done so long ago. It seemed like ages ago.

General Canijory was sitting on the hard floor near the starboard-side loading door. Mary Trimshippe was at his side, just trying to mop up that blood flow, and, now and again, waving a small bottle of spirits of ammonia under his nose. The sweating, lip-biting man reacted to the pungent cut of that treatment and said, "That's the ticket, young lady. Yes, sir—Keep the old man going for just a few minutes more."

Air Marshal Kidder, stiff and straight, was standing near the sitting general. With one hand, the right, he held tightly to the top arc of the door frame. His left hand clutched at that hot, throbbing hip. As he stood, he gazed cross-bay out through Gunner Murphy's blister toward the action on and above Helgoland.

"General," he mused, "I'd say that the fires of yon pit of hell have been drawn. And the teeth of Hydra-headed old Helgoland, also. If ya'll pardon a man for mixing his bally-old metaphors more than a little. Yes, sir, there's a deal less of archie now. I believe the boys are riding more safely across.

"Ah, I spoke too soon. There goes one of our big fellows into the sea now. But there are fewer flak ships hereabouts.

"Lord, there's a ship down there. See't? Jove, it's bottoms-up and with a swarm of gray-green Huns a-clinging to the plates. Must've been Hun troopers either trying to get on, or away from Helgoland.

"I like to see Huns clinging to something for dear life. I'm not a bit maudlin about the beggars. If it weren't"—and the air marshal hesitated a bit with pain, for the man was merely trying to keep busy with conversation against that pain—"were it not

for the Hun, Canijory old man, you and I might be, at this very moment, enjoying siesta at some colonial post. Yes, sir, and the lady here would be at matinee. And these young lads"—his eyes were on the three dead men acting as ship's ballast—"might be on the Fall football field instead of dead aboard a Flying Fortress above a foreign sea."

General Canijory, with his head forward between his bent knees, was doing one hell of a sweat. But he stopped biting down on the lower lip long enough to mumble, "Better dead aboard a Fort, Kidder, than alive on their knees under the Axis whip. Dead? If they're dead, then it's our fault. If we have the brains that God gave to little green apples, we'll make them live forever—

"You say Helgoland is cooling off, eh? Mister, we took it while it was hot. Yes, sir, we did.

"Say, tall feller, you'd better sit down. I'm not the only cripple in this ship. You—"

That was all. Kidder glanced toward the floor and started to say something. Then, without warning, all the self-inducted starch went out of the man. He was on the floor. And he was out cold.

Mary Trimshippe had the bottle under the nose of that big horseface. And the acrid bite wasn't working worth a cent. The man was far gone.

"Put a chute on Marshal Kidder, men," General Canijory said to the watching gunners.

Sergeant Yates pounced on that little job quickly, for the Danish coast wasn't far away; and, already, Colonel Haslip was turning in toward the southern hook of the North Frisians, intent upon cutting across those islands to the mainland.

"Sir," Yates remarked, "this is goin' to be one swell red-letter day for the pigs—getting two Allied general officers without even trying for them. I hope to hell you have luck with them Danes."

"We'll need it, Sergeant," Canijory said. "Thanks. Is the marshall all set? Good. Get him right over here in the doorway.

"Now how are you going to get us on the air?" the general wanted to know. "I question whether I could even pull the ring."

Yates was end-to-ending some ammunition-case straps into a safety-belt, and when the quick hook-up was complete he had himself belted at the waist and hooked to the solid frame of the ship's sidewall. "I'll get you out and pull the ripcords, sir," he promised. "Just leave it to me. It's old stuff for me, sir. I've put bales of grub and supplies overboard this way—during the paratroop training down South before we came over."

Colonel Haslip took a buzz from Belly Gunner Nevada Anderson.

"See that flak ship burning, off there to the west, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, what about it?" Haslip wanted to know.

"I think there's a Hun submarine in alongside trying to take off the crew. We could do some good for that sub if we were overhead."

"Corporal," Haslip answered, "that's a temptation, but I'm running for the Danish coast. We're going to drop General Canijory by chute. He's badly hit. He's got to run chances of getting to a hospital."

"Aw, hell—too bad," Nevada phoned. "But, say, sir! Look, see what I see? Here comes three destroyers hell bent for that flak ship. They'll wash it up."

The oncoming trio of destroyers were at a good distance, perhaps six or eight miles north of the place where the flak ship and the submarine were working side-by-side against time and fire.

"But this isn't too good," Haslip told Nevada. "These are Allied destroyers, all right. See, they're old four-stackers, some of the original world-saving fifty, I'll bet. But, hell, they'll run in on that burning flak ship and, maybe, get themselves holed by that sub."

"You've got your radiophone, sir," Nevada reminded the colonel. "Can't you warn 'em?"

"Radioman Lasky is dead, Corporal. He died in that last flak field. I can't quit this seat. General Canijory is too far gone to get off the floor. Air Marshal Kidder is out cold. There's nobody left to use the ship-to-ship radio, and I'm not cut in on it at present. Anyway, it's knocked out. It'd take fixing—

"But say, wait a shake! That's all, Corporal."

Colonel Haslip reached back via interphone for the men in his waist-gunners' bay.

Yates stripped off his earpads and passed them down to General Canijory.

"What say, Haslip?" the general asked.

"Sir, we have three Allied destroyers coming down from the north. Would you take a chance in the water, run the risk of being picked up? And warn Navy there's a sub near that flak ship."

"God's in his heaven, all's well here on earth!" the hard-hit Canijory enthused. "Where the devil are they? Give us the word, and say when— And I'll remember the sub—near the ship, eh?"

"It'll be a matter of less than a minute, sir," Haslip warned. "Now if I can have Sergeant Yates and Gunner Murphy on the line, I'll get things in order.

"Hello, Yates. Hello, Murph'. Be ready with your door wide. I'm beginning to stagger 'er. Keep the ear peeled now."

Mary Trimshippe, still wearing the parachute into which Nevada had strapped her, had suddenly buttoned the coveralls tightly around her neck. Then she stated, more or less matter of fact, "I just pull this hand grip here, is that it?"

Yates froze there, wild-eyed. "You just what? When? How do you mean?" he asked.

"When I jump," she said.

"Who the—what the—hey, you're not jumpin' from this ship, Miss Trimshippe," he warned. "They're goin' into the water."

"I made up my mind to go with the general when Denmark was chosen," Mary stated flatly. "And I'll go now. I've heard that open chutes drag men under water, after they hit, and the general can't stand that. I'm a good swimmer, Sergeant. I'm good in the water. No darned good in the air, but good in water."

"No, no, no," General Canijory objected. "Young lady—"

"Don't you 'young lady' me, General Canijory!" the lady snapped. "When I say I'm going, I'm—"

"On your toes!" came the word from Haslip. "Thirty seconds more—twenty—ten— Out!"

Yates and Murphy, each handling a general officer, eased their charges through the door and pulled the grips. And as they did so, something went headfirst over their shoulders and Mary Trimshippe was falling, falling, falling. And the girl must have thought it all out. She was actually delaying the opening. Through the first thousand feet of the three-thousand fall, she tumbled, then, well into the second thousand, her chute burst wide open and she was on her way. Meantime, the other two chutes were in full flower; and "The Slave Driver" was once more returning to full power and carrying on into the northwest.

The Navy was quick. Haslip had planned the thing so's to put three floating chutes where the destroyer men would either stop to pick them up or run them down. And Navy wasn't running anybody down that day.

"By hell," the watching Yates finally cussed, "that gal's out of that chute harness and swimming even before the other two have hit water. What a dame! Gee, to think she'd pull that!"

"You can't figure 'em," Murphy agreed. "They'll cry on a guy's shoulder one minute, then kick his teeth in the next; and they get mad as hell when you say 'Eh-eh, you can't do that.' And that's where you made your big mistake, Yates. You should have told her she could jump."

Five minutes later, Stinger Ray spoke up from his tail position.

"It's a hundred per cent pick-up," he said. "The Navy's got all three. Say, if that was the dame that made the jump, she had one of the men out of his chute even before it could begin to drag him under. Gor'bless the good old Mae Wests, eh?"

XV

FIVE live men aboard "The Slave Driver" where once there had been thirteen men and a girl! Five living and three dead still riding home! And home a long, long way off. It had been a day!

Colonel Haslip was dog-tired. He gazed northward toward the cloudbank in the distance and prayed for that—just let him get in there and the rest would be easy. He'd get them back to England. But if he had to do any more fighting— How much fighting could he be expected to do now? No bow gunners left. No top turret guns. And, worse yet, no co-pilot, no relief if he were to get it; and the man found himself wondering how he'd missed it. It just wasn't in the cards for luck like that to hold.

When "The Slave Driver" rode into the outer fringe of the cloudbank, Colonel Haslip looked closely to his exact position. He had no navigator to take care of it now. He intended to hide in that cloudbank all the way, what is more. He estimated that, turning slightly southwest-by-west, he'd be on a direct line between Sheffield and the spot on the coast where Denmark and Germany make a border.

On second thought, there might be other ships riding in that cloudbank. Ships that needed its protection far more than his craft. Crippled ships, ships limping home on three, two or one motor. So he decided to go down and ascertain just how much good visibility there was under the clouds. After taking the big ship downstairs with care, she rode into the clear just below 300 feet.

Three hundred's all right when a man's on the way home. So he stuck to that skimpy altitude for a full half hour of flight.

He knew that his gunners would relax now, and that was all right, too. But why keep the long, lean cowhand in the belly turret? Better get that young fellow out of there anyway. These engines were as tired as he. The oil pressure on the outer left motor was already falling. This ship might yet call for a water landing. Better do it right now—get Nevada up and out.

He buzzed the belly turret. "Come up for air, Corporal," he said. "We're a hundred miles off the Dutch coast here, so nothing is likely to come along."

"Okay, sir," Nevada said. "That is, if I can uncramp myself from this form-fitting cellophane wrapper. Guess I'll have to get a pull-up by the other men." So Nevada made a great noise on his roof. "Hey, gang," he said, when the small hatch was opened, "how about a slight extraction? I'm going to come out of here feet first."

"This is goin' to hurt a bit," old Yates warned. And so saying, he put willing hands on Nevada's left boot while Murphy reached for the right. "Heave-ho!" said Yates.

"Hold it! Hold it! I've gone to work and dropped my makin's," Nevada yelled. "Lower me a notch. Okay again. But wait, hold everything! Hey, Sarg, take a look! Down there on the water. That's a raft! There's a guy on it too—and another hanging on in the water.

"Get the rag out and tell the pilot!"

Yates dropped Nevada's leg. Murphy did likewise. He slid back into the belly turret. They bolted forward to tell Colonel Haslip what the corporal had sighted.

"Heaven to Betsy!" said Haslip. "Can't that Anderson gent stop finding things? A raft? What the devil sort of a raft?" and he was already flying his turnabout.

"A regulation yeller raft, one of the rubber babies," said Yates. "I got a gander at it myself, sir. One man on, one off."

"Waving?" Haslip asked. "Did they see us?"

"Couldn't say," said Yates. "But how could they miss seeing this big baby?"

"I'd hate to disappoint men on a raft," Haslip mused, still flying his turnabout. "Any day now, you and I might wind up men on a raft, Sergeant. Yes, sir, it can happen to anybody.

"There it is. Well I'll be damned for a blind daylight owl! How did I fly across that sight without seeing it?" Haslip wondered. "Man, oh man, that looks bad. Looks like a dead man clinging in the water."

"And it looks like a dead man on the raft, too," said old Yates.

"Now what?" the colonel asked. "No radio! No per cent in us doing a crash landing and trying to rescue them, for where'd we be with nobody to rescue us? They'd be no better off. But what the devil, what the devil! Any suggestions?"

"It stops me," Yates admitted.

Nevada Anderson was up out of his hole and crowding in behind Yates. The lanky ex-cowhand was strapping into his chute.

"Sir," he said, "I'll make a jump for it and see what I can do for those guys. It's a cinch the one in the water is still alive. And it's also a cinch he's too far gone to pull himself aboard. If you'll drop me upwind, sir, I'll—"

"You know what it means, Corporal, if you get roughed up and can't even get yourself aboard that raft, say nothing of the other fellow?" Haslip asked.

"I'll have to run the chance, sir," Nevada decided. "We have no other choice."

"Right," Yates said, and he, too, had reached for a chute. It was Radioman Lasky's chute that was handiest, right there in the small wireless bay. "I'll go with—"

"No! No! Dammit no, Yates!" the col-

onel ordered. "You're no spring chicken. Dammit, man, you'd have trouble swinging a leg over the rim of a bathtub, and you know it. You can't jump!"

Murphy was there. He said, "I'll give Anderson a hand, sir. I'm a pretty good guy in the water. Almost as good as the girl."

For the first time, wild-eyed, Nevada turned and stared toward the navigator's bay, and the small drop seat on which he had last seen Mary Trimshippe.

"What girl? What girl's good in water?" he almost yelled.

"Your girl," Yates blurted out. "She went down by chute. She jumped when we sent down the general and Air Marshal Kidder. You saw 'em picked up, didn't you? You saw three chutes?"

"Sure," said Nevada. "But I thought—By gosh, Sarg, I thought you were lightening the ship."

"Oh no," said Yates. "Those were three live jumpers, kid. An' by hell, the gal made a delayed jump. A full ten or twelve hundred feet of delayed fall. What a woman!"

XVI

CIRCLING as tightly as possible, always holding the raft in view, Colonel Haslip once more reminded his willing gunners that it wasn't going to be easy. The gunners were strapping on first-aid kits.

"Three hundred's very short notice for a parachute, when you really want it to open," he said. "I can't take on any more altitude without getting into the canopy and losing sight of that raft. If I lose sight of it, you men are likely to land too far away. We can't afford to chance that."

"I could send 'em away on a static pull, sir," Yates suggested. "Just like I got the big boys onto the air. They were wide open almost before they were out of my hands."

"I'd go for that," Nevada said.

"Same here," Murphy agreed.

"It's settled," Haslip decided. "I'll make two runs across the target, just upwind from the raft. There isn't much wind on the water, hardly a ripple. The chutes shouldn't carry very far—not in three hundred feet of fall—300 feet!"

So Yates and the two gunners went aft to the big door, and Haslip took "The Slave Driver" out of its great circle and went into the west for a good half mile before once more flying a turn and starting back. The wind was off the Dutch coast, out of the south, so his return line of flight held his big ship just to windward of the yellow raft on the sea below.

"We're set, sir!" Yates sang out; and Nevada Anderson was standing in the doorway like a fancy swimmer on a springboard. Yates was strapping into his own safety-belt again. His long right arm was around Nevada, with one hand on the ripcord's grip. His left hand was in the middle of Nevada's back. He was ready to pull and push; and he was the man to do it.

"Be ready!" came from the pilot. "Twenty seconds! Ten! Five! Out!"

The crack of silk sounded like a rifle-shot in the ears of Yates and Murphy, so quick and close was the opening.

"See how easy it is?" Yates sang out to Murphy. "Come on, Irish, get set!"

Colonel Haslip was soon flying another turn at the eastern end of his short run. And soon he was coming down the line again. Glancing raft-ward as he came, he saw what looked like half a chute on the surface—very close to the raft — and Nevada was swimming the last few yards that separated him from that destination. The colonel breathed just a bit easier.

So once more Yates had yelled, "We're set, sir!" and again Haslip gave them the old "Twenty! Ten! Five!" and "Out!"

"Take it away, sir!" Yates was yelling. "They're both down! Say, that's the business we should be in!"

Colonel Haslip, knowing that he had dallied all too long on this over-water flight, then held to his westward course; for there was nothing more he could do about those men on the raft.

Well under way again, he was talking to his tail gunner.

"How are they making out, Stinger?" he asked.

"Okay, sir. They've got that man out of the water and on the raft now. Yeah, now they're all aboard. And they're giving us a wave. Man, oh man, they can have that low-altitude jumpin', sir! Dammit, sir, I've been dragging my hands in the water back here."

"Stop dragging your feet in the water back there," Haslip ordered, "and come for-

ward. Young feller, you've been riding backwards so long that you'll be surprised to learn that this ship still has a front end.

"Man, oh man, talking about ends, is my sitter cramped to this constipated stoop?" groaned Haslip, this to Sergeant Yates who had come forward to lean on the top of the empty co-pilot's seat.

"I could spell you for a while, sir," Sergeant Yates offered.

The colonel turned to stare at Yates, pretty much as you would if the Grim Reaper or Father Time had suddenly offered to run a combine harvester or abandon the hour-glass for Bulova.

"You fly, Sergeant?" he asked.

"Strictly according to the Yates' method," Yates was free to admit. "It's nothing fancy, sir, but I've gone down to the depot and stood uncovered for lots of boys that were rated better than me."

"Slide in behind that control column!" Haslip cheered.

Old Yates' feet found the pedals through instinct, and his mitts took to the cut-away wheel lightly and free of all tension; and Colonel Haslip knew that the old hand could fly.

Haslip just slumped. His shoulders drooped. His arms fell. His feet and shins —suddenly turned to rubber — were just limp, misshapen things that welcomed a rest and didn't care how they looked. The man was fine-drawn, fatigued to the breaking point, just plain "Pooped" to use his own words.

"You know how it is," he said, "a man never knows what you old hands can do—or if there's anything you can't do aboard a ship. But I didn't suppose you could handle this baby."

"I was never hot," Yates said. "But, by hell, sir, I was always willin'. I've had time on just about everything that Air Force and Air Corps has had since 1917. Jennies, Nieuports, Avros, DH-4s, Martin Bombers, chicken-coop type, Tommies, an' the Lord knows what else.

"Say, sir, some day remind me to tell you about the time I washed out General Repap's private ship down in Florida. Man, was that a day! General Repap—he was just a colonel then—was in—"

"General Repap!" Haslip said, sat bolt upright, and sort-a turned to gaze aft. "Repap! Yates, that was General Repap in the water! Back at the raft. Ye gods, Sergeant, I thought that man's face was familiar—the general!"

"I don't know, I don't know," Yates stammered. "I know the old boy's face as well as I know my own in a mirror, but I just wasn't lookin' close at the man in the water. It could be the general. Gee what a setup—the Nevada kid on a raft with the Old Man! I knew I should've made that jump. But what the devil, the Old Man hasn't given me a tumble in twenty years—not since I washed out that private ship of his."

Colonel Haslip had to laugh. He said, "You're right, Yates. Sure you're right. The general wouldn't want a leg-up from you now."

XVII

GENERAL REPAP, however, wasn't objecting to the last-hope aid that came so unexpectedly in the form of Corporal Nevada Anderson and Gunner Murphy. General Repap was the man in the water, and the general had been in that water for nearly twenty-four hours at the time of rescue. And earthly time had nearly run out on him.

The other man on the raft—a gunner sergeant—was dead. And it took all the whiskey provided by two emergency kits to bring General Repap to a place where he could explain just a few hazy items.

"We were pretty hard hit just west of Kiel," he said. "Both flak and enemy fighters hit us. We lost every gun position, with the exception of the top turret, in that one brush.

"Well, Colonel Wood got us out over the water, but we had only two engines. And one of them was losing oil. There were only five of us still living when we hit water. This was the only raft we were able to get inflated. Colonel Wood and the radioman never came to the surface. But three of us, the navigator, this gunner, Sergeant Batten, and I managed to get aboard."

"Better have another shot of this, sir," Nevada offered.

General Repap took the jolt of whiskey. His eyes were on Nevada's face. "What's your name, soldier?" he asked.

"Anderson — Corporal Anderson," Nevada answered,

General Repap drew in a deep breath, glanced away, then back to Nevada's face for another look, then tried to talk some more.

"All kinds of craft—both surface and air—have passed this way, but not a damned one to stop for us!" he said. "There's been a steady parade today. What's up?"

"Helgoland, sir," Nevada answered. "It's being reduced."

"I planned it," Repap stated. "Dammit, they wouldn't wait for me. 'Course they wouldn't. I'm missing—in action.

"Well, sometime after dark last night—it was long before midnight — a cruiser roared past here. It was so close I could see the watch aboard. But it didn't see us. Its wake tossed this raft clear out of the water. Rolled us over and over in white water; and then the damned thing had whistled out of sight.

"The navigator never showed up. Sergeant Batten, here, couldn't swim. My duds encumbered me so much that I had all I could do getting myself—say nothing of another man—back to the raft. First, I had to find the raft in the dark, and, at the same time, try to keep afloat with the sergeant. We lost our Mae Wests in the spill. Damned fools, we'd taken them off to use as pillows."

"But the sergeant's dead, sir," Gunner Murphy said.

"He was as good as dead when I managed to push him aboard again. Then I wasn't able to pull myself aboard and work on him. He never regained consciousness. The man was fortunate, damned fortunate! Damme," the general then cussed lowly, "to think that I couldn't climb aboard a rubber raft!"

For a short spell, the sun fell below the canopy of cloudbank and sparkled on the North Sea. Then the man on the raft watched that sun slide below the horizon, and darkness was on the sea. An hour or so after sunset, the wind out of the south fell. Then the sky came right down to the water, and the men on the raft were in a fog, heavy, chill and spirit-crushing.

DURING the long black hours of night, that fog never quit the surface for a single minute. Time and again, off there in the fog, the men on the raft could hear the whir and whiz or throb of marine engines. They might be in friendly craft, hunting for the raft, or they could be in enemy ships bent on the destruction of anything that fell to their guns—or prows.

Once, just after midnight, one craft in the fog was so close that the deck watch could be heard calling the hour. It was a guttural voice. It was within hailing distance. The three men sat bolt upright. Then General Repap warned the other two to silence.

"Don't sing out," he said. "That voice could be almost anything—any kind of a Scandinavian, or even a Hun. Better sit tight, men, and hold our luck. You say your Fort was still in good flying condition, that it was certain to get back to England?"

"Yes, sir," Nevada answered. "And Colonel Haslip had this line of travel well determined. He had just studied the line, and, I think, said we were a hundred miles off the Dutch coast."

The fog was still heavy on the North Sea when the sun came to the rest of northwestern Europe. Three men on the raft sat huddled, ate the iron rations from the emergency kits brought down by Nevada and Murphy, and cussed the fog, the North Sea and the rest of Europe—all of Europe, not just the northwest sections.

Along toward nine o'clock, the fog began to lift.

"It's burning off," General Repap said. "Thank God for that. Now we'll see what we'll see."

As the drapery of fog lifted, they saw more and more sea. Sea as far as the eye could carry—in all directions—and nothing on that sea.

"I wouldn't believe it," the general mused. "You couldn't tell me that, during a war like this, a man could find the North Sea entirely void of all craft. It isn't natural. Dammit all, men, it just isn't regulations!"

It was nearly nine-thirty when Sergeant Murphy suddenly tried to stand, so excited was he. He was still trying to talk and point when he lost his footing entirely and took a header overside.

"Damn you and your morning dip, Murph!" Nevada cussed, trying to help the excited man aboard the Jello float again.

"Off to the west!" Murphy was saying, still bound that he'd point it out. "A boat! A fast baby with a white wave on its bow.

Looks like a pick-up boat coming our way."

"What eyesight!" Nevada marvelled. "M'gosh, Murph' that boat must be two hundred miles away, maybe still on the other side of England. But it's a boat."

"If it's for us, it's a boat," General Repap growled. ""Where is this boat?"

XVIII

IN THE sick bay of one of three destroyers, in the water just northwest of Helgoland, Air Marshal Kidder was fully awake, lying on his right side, and talking battle with the ship's captain whenever that busy officer found time to drop in and ask how the marshal felt now. Of course, Kidder's battle talk was pretty much of air. And the briefing angle still had him down.

"The Yanks, captain, are too thorough," he said to the British naval man. "Now, ya see, we all brief the flights. But our command men have learned to brush it lightly. It's devilish stuff at best, and 'tis hell if overdone. Now consider this Yank group I went out with today. How long do ya suppose the briefing lasted?"

"I wouldn't guess," said the captain.

"Coward!" said Kidder. "Well, I'll tell ya—an hour and a quarter, and better, Captain. Men were in a sweat. Some even broke right there.

"What's the latest word on General Canijory, Captain?"

"He's coming along fine. The jugular wasn't severed," the captain stated. "By the by, Marshal, who's the young woman? Not the general's secretary, as some say, is't?"

"Lord no," derided Kidder. "Miss Mary Trimshippe, close friend of mine, Captain. A newspaper lady. Also, last but not least, the niece of the late Major General Repap."

"Repap gone? How?" the captain asked.

"Lost in a raid. Went out with a Flying Fortress sweep and failed to show," said Kidder.

"The Flying Fortress? Been called the Flying Targets, haven't they?"

"Well, by some I guess," the now-noncommittal Air Marshal Kidder hedged. "It's neither here nor there, laddie. After all, if enough flak catches up with one, what matter if it be in a Flying Fort, a Flying Target or aboard a flying mare? When do we run for England, Captain?"

"We're still waiting orders," the captain answered. "One can't cut a craft out of this North Sea patrol and run for England on mere squadron order, no matter how urgent the cause. It all takes time, much time, Marshal. However, we'll lose no time when the order is wirelessed to us. The general really needs hospitalization."

Mary Trimshippe and the general were in the sick bay of another of the three destroyers; the medicos deciding that the lady needed a few hours of rest, quiet, observation and a spot of tea.

Just after dark, when that fog had come down on the North Sea, the three destroyers made rendezvous with the main body of the squadron; then, keeping clear of the mine fields, the group of seven worked northwestward under slow, cautious rate of travel. At times the fog was even too heavy for that, and it was well after midnight—two-thirty in the morning, to be exact—when the captain once more came to Kidder's berth in sick bay. The marshal was still awake, talking with a chief pharmacist's mate, and saying, "Now, as we've learned from sore experience, it's bad enough to brief the sitting men—the pilots, bombardiers, navigators and wireless lads—but my friends on this Flying Fortress area even brief the gunners. Mind you, the boys who must face the flak and gunfire but are in no position to do anything about it. So why tell 'em about it aforehand, say I!

"Hello, Captain—ya've got news?"

"Aye, aye, sir," the captain agreed. "You will be moved over to the *Ipswich* and she'll run for Hull."

"Good! She'll run like hell for Hull, eh what? Let's go! What the devil am I doing in the downy anyway?" Kidder cheered.

General Canijory and Mary Trimshippe were asleep aboard the *Ipswich* when Kidder was trans-shipped strapped to a litter; and the old four-stacker, under special Admiralty order, was on her way through darkness and fog for Hull and a hospital. Slowly at first, through that enemy-infested blackness, but with rising speed when that nine o'clock sun began to burn off the mists.

JUST as the *Ipswich* began to get a good white wave on her nose, her wireless man took two special messages in rapid succession. The first message was a general code

broadcast to all fleet units of the Allied command. It warned all North Sea patrols, surface craft and Fleet Air Arm planes, to be on the lookout for a raft with four men aboard at such-and-such a position.

"Men on a raft, Miss," remarked the captain of the plunging, racing *Ipswich*," "there's a great plenty of them."

Mary Trimshippe, afoot now and standing at the captain's side behind a canvas dodger, agreed. "It should be quite easy to find some men on a raft—almost any number of men on several rafts—after so many aircraft went into the North Sea yesterday. Captain, I think I'd almost prefer to have my man on a raft, rather than think he was riding out again in a Flying Fortress. That—it was too much for me."

"Tush, girl. You who made a parachute fall of your own free will! Lord, lady, I'd sooner die.

"What ya got there—another wireless? Let me have it."

This was the second wireless flash, rapidly decoded, all ready for the captain's quick reading. This, too, was for all ships and planes of the Allied commands. It said that a German Dornier-Do. 26 four-engined flying boat had made a landing in The Humber, in the lee of Spurn Head, taken on two or more persons, then put to sea, eastbound. It was a commercial boat but had guns mounted.

"Hmm!" the captain mused. "A Dornier boat—four-engined craft—identifications on hull: D-AGNT—swastika on rudder."

"Is this a common happening?" Mary Trimshippe asked.

"Oh yes, Miss," he answered. "Our Fleet Air Arm boys land our agents wherever there's enemy water, by night or by day, then take them out the same way. The enemy does likewise. But I must be getting all men to stations. The devil! Maybe I'll get the opportunity to throw my hat at the Dornier beggar."

It was 9:45 when the captain had all anti-aircraft gunners piped to stations. It was only a few minutes later when he came back to Mary's side and once more studied the sea ahead—and the sky afar.

"The position given for those men on a raft is close in now," he said. "What's more, a direct line of flight from The Humber to the German coast proper just about meets this position given. Damme, Miss—well, anyway, I hope we pick up the chaps on the raft."

XIX

SERGEANT MURPHY, pulled safely aboard the raft again, was sitting on the western end, wringing out his hair and ears, and facing east.

"Hey!" he suddenly exclaimed, raised an arm and pointed to the horizon behind Nevadas back. "Another ship! An' is she boilin'! Looks like one of them there destroyers."

General Repap, still mighty weak, turned where he sat at mid-raft. He said, "For hours and days, not a ship to give us a leg-up, and now they're going to fight over us."

The U. S. Air Forces crash boat coming out of the west was within a half mile of them by then; and it was still coming behind a white mustache on its bow that spoke of speed. It was going to beat the British destroyer to the honors.

Of a sudden, though, the crash boat changed its course a few points—as though to run wide of the raft. And, when it came directly abeam to the south, the three men on the raft could see great, fast-moving action aboard. Men were hurtling themselves pell-mell for battle stations.

"Hump!" the general humped. "First they were going to rescue us, and now it looks as though they're going to shoot us. Damn the Navy! What the hell are they doing—running wide of us like that?"

The destroyer out of the east was within a mile of the raft's position by then, and, strange to say, it too was running wide of them—to the north and west. And stranger yet, the British destroyer suddenly burst into gunfire. They were training all ack-ack guns into the west, and with a low projectory. Then the crash boat's multiple guns were barking; and their hellish belching was into the west, too.

"Gun practice!" said the general. "Dammit, men, count the salvos. Maybe we rate a salute."

"It's a plane, sir! A big boat! A Hun, sir!" Nevada exclaimed.

"Gee, she's a four-engined Dornier!" said Murphy. "Eh, I mean—she *was* a four-engined Dornier. They've winged her! They've winged her! Yes, sir, she's out of

control. Crashing, sure as you're a foot high."

"Nice work!" said General Repap. "It was our U. S. crash boat that got that Hun. I could see the burst bash in the Hun's starboard bow."

WHETHER it was the crash boat's score or the destroyer's kill mattered little. The Dornier, having seen either the crash boat or the men on the raft, had been coming eastward in a long dive, intent, no doubt, on having a bit of murderous fun with its fixed bow guns. Those guns, according to the destroyer folk, fired just briefly. And the wooden deck of the Yank crash boat had a few splintered spots to prove it. So the crash boat moved in and put a line on the Dornier wreckage, then prepared to swing a boom and lift the ex-commercial boat inboard to the salvage deck.

Meantime, the destroyer had made a fast run around the scene of crash and brought up bow-in—with engines whizzing now in reverse—to the raft.

And Mary Trimshippe was standing at the forerail alongside the captain, gazing down at four men on a raft.

"Found your uncle," stammered Nevada. "He's all right."

"Uncle Harry!" Mary said. "You! And on a raft with—why, it's silly."

"What are you doing here—aboard a destroyer on patrol?" General Repap demanded. "Who the devil authorized this?"

"Nobody," Mary stated. "By the way, Uncle Harry, we have Air Marshal Kidder and General Canijory aboard, in the sick bay. General Canijory has your job now. And he's swell."

"Canijory, eh! Replaced me, eh! I supposed he was the boy who authorized your being the *first* woman to receive permission to ride a destroyer on patrol?"

"And, I think," the destroyer captain offered, "the first lady to make a parachute fall, in battle action. The lady, sir, came down with General Repap and Air Marshal Kidder. They were badly done in, ya know."

"Badly done-in be damned!" somebody was barking, and, fighting off a few sick-bay attendants as they came, General Canijory and Kidder were making their uncertain way forward. "Hey, what the devil! What are you doing, Henry o' hoss—rowing a bit on the pond in Central Park on your day off?

"And Corporal Anderson! And you, Murphy? Say, what goes on here!"

"I don't follow the dashed scenario a'tall, General Canijory," Kidder put in. "The continuity's all askew, as 'twere."

By then, just to break the screwy continuity for Kidder's benefit, the destroyer's crewmen began to help three living and one dead man over the side. At the same time, with Dornier wreckage aboard, the crash boat was working in close. And when the railside gathering aboard the destroyer stood at the port rail and gazed down they were looking at four very dead people stretched on the Yank's hard deck planking. Three men and a woman.

"I think we know some of the folks, Mary," Nevada said.

All eyes at the rail—and many aboard the Yank—turned to stare at the fellow who knew some of the enemy dead.

"It's the Lodz woman," Mary said. "And I can't cry."

"And that one"—Nevada was pointing to the body that seemed the longest, wettest and deadest—"is the tall, thin gent, the one who was with the Lodz gal when they overheard you and the marshal. Guess the other two are just pilots."

"Don't know what it's all about!" General Repap snapped; "but I guess these crash-boat people can bring in the wreckage.

"So you've got my job, Canijory? Let's go below deck and talk it over. Maybe you can't hold it, sick as I am."

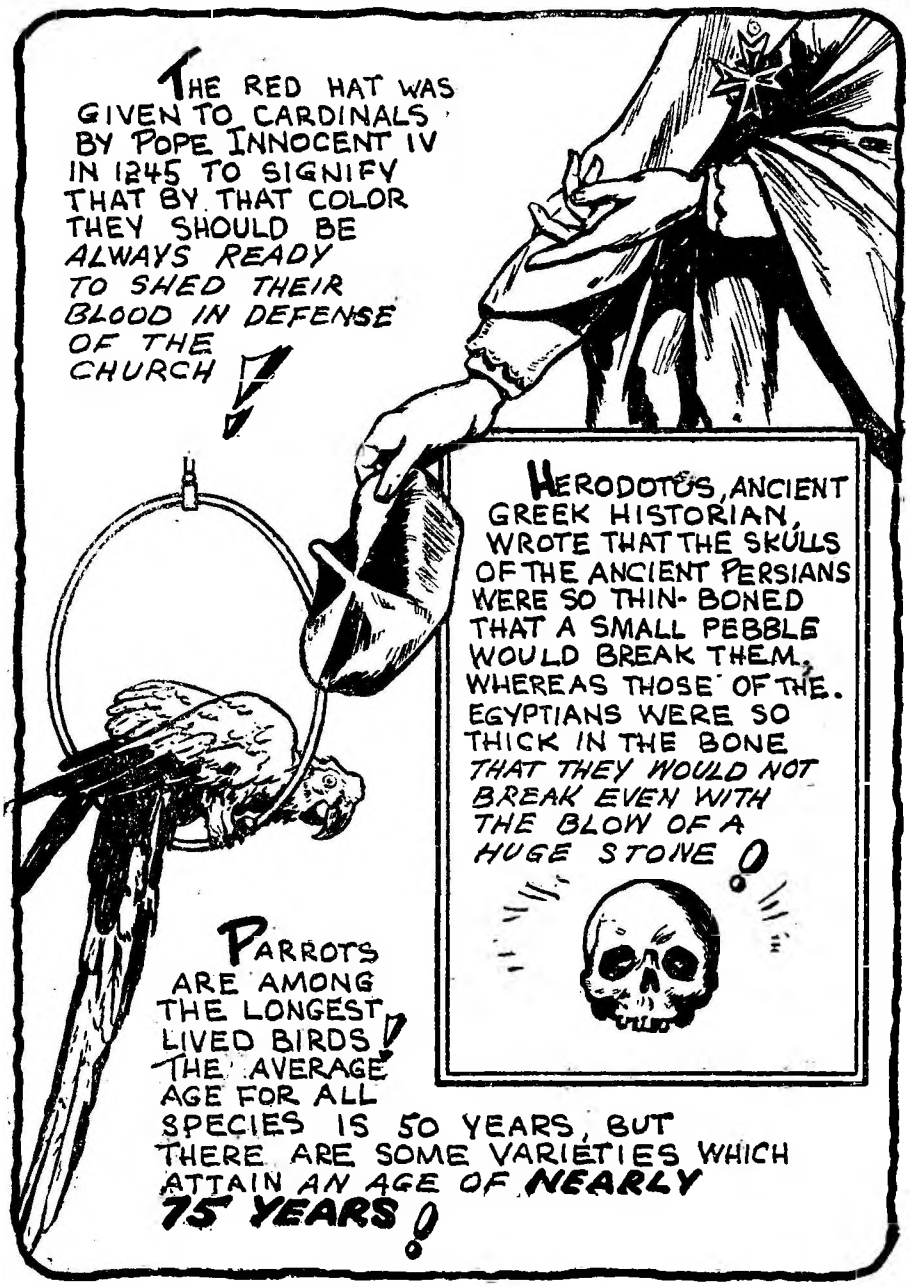
"Just a minute, just a minute," insisted Canijory. "This destroyer is at sea. The skipper has a Book. Are you going to give these kids your uncley blessing, or do I have to make it an order?"

"You order whom!" snapped Repap. "Why, hell! As soon as I spent the first five minutes with Nevada, here, I knew he was the boy. The kid's stout, Canijory. And by the damn, I'll reduce him to a buck private if he doesn't act like a man now."

"You all embarrass us!" Mary said. "So let's embarrass you-all, just for a change. Nevada and I took the step, down in Sheffield, just a few hours after one old stinker uncle had a few words with Personnel's Captain Case. Are you weak, Uncle Henry?"

Curioddities

By Weill



What is the only game bird that breeds in every one of the United States?

See Curioddities next time.

VALLEY OF THE SHORT MEN

CHAPTER I

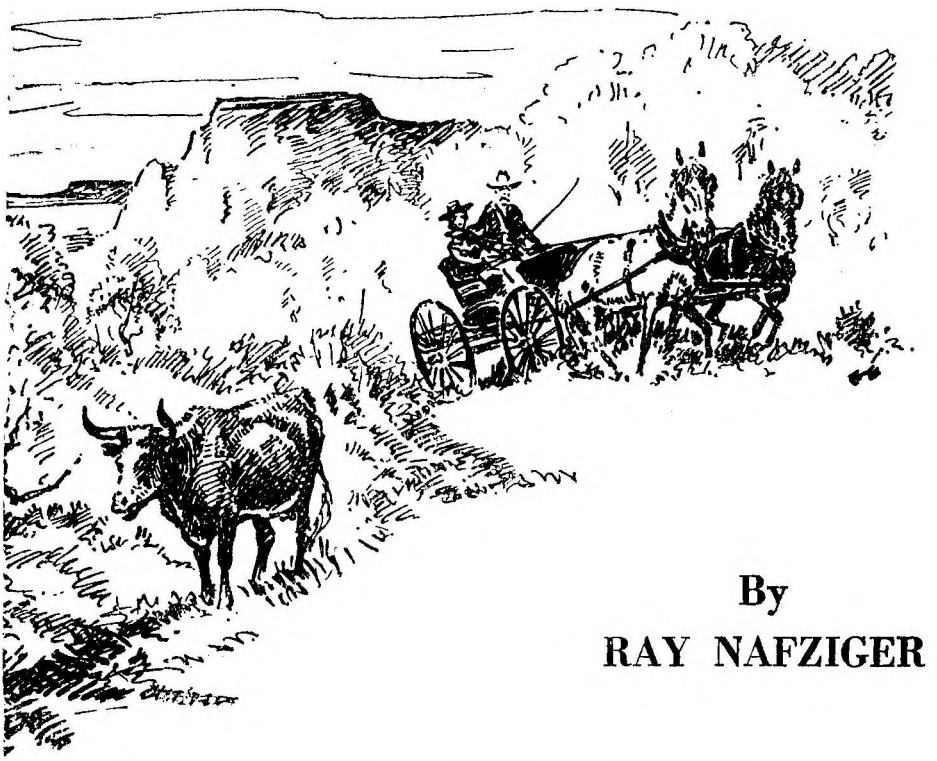
REFLECTED GLORY

HUGH BRYCE, after looking over a bunch of his cattle on High Mesa, dropped off by way of a ridge that brought him into the ranch of his neighbor, Eb Staghorn, at Pinole Springs. The Staghorn place comprised little more than a set of pole corrals and a long shack, the latter built like a Mexican peon's jacal, with poles stuck upright, daubed with clay and roofed with bear grass and mud. Even in Arizona Territory in Apache times, Staghorn's was an eyesore as ranches went.

Passing by a grove of tall cottonwoods near the springs, Hugh Bryce heard a sudden curse, and then in a rasping angered voice, "I tole you to keep up that black horse in the corral, damn you, button!"

As Bryce came from behind the trees, he saw near a corral corner the rawboned near-giant, Dake Salmon, who was loafing about the Staghorn ranch. Hugh knew Salmon only as a man with a strong streak of cruelty and an eager liking for stories about Apache atrocities to white men and women. In one hand Salmon now held a three-foot cedar club; the other clutched the jacket of fifteen-year-old Clemmie Orr. With all his strength, Salmon whacked the club down across Clemmie's shoulders, dangerously close to his head. The boy raised a loud howl of agony.

. . . . *One Debt a Man Doesn't Mind Owing His Son*



By
RAY NAFZIGER

Hugh Bryce spurred in shouting at Salmon. The big fellow, his club lifted high again, turned just as Bryce reached him. Bryce grabbed the stout cedar stick and catching Salmon off balance, wrenched it away to fling it across the corral rail.

"You'll kill him with that, Dake," Bryce growled.

Salmon glared, his big shoulders hunching, craggy head lowering as if to charge horse and rider. Then his yellowish eyes dropped to Bryce's waist where a six-shooter was holstered. "I ain't got no gun on me," he snarled, "or I'd knock you out of that saddle with it. An' if you didn't have a gun, I'd beat the tar outa yuh."

Hugh Bryce promptly swung from his horse and unbuckling his own gun-belt, laid it and its filled holster on the ground. In one sense it wasn't Hugh Bryce who was taking up Salmon's challenge; it was Hugh Bryce's father, "Bravo" Bryce. Hugh had heard a dozen stories of Bravo doing just that—taking off his six-shooter and ranger badge to tackle another man barehanded and on even terms. Bravo Bryce's son could do no less.

Without warning Salmon leaped in to send a hoof-hard fist whistling at Bryce's head. Bryce barely ducked in time and then they were slugging away. Salmon's reach was longer, and when he landed, it was like being kicked by a rock at the end of a steam-driven piston. The man's swarthy face was convulsed with fury and he fought tigerishly—too tigerishly, for he wasted half his swings on thin air. In return Bryce worked doggedly on Salmon's face, snapping the man's head back repeatedly. He had more speed than Salmon, but one smash to the head that he hadn't been able to duck had dazed and slowed him down. Fighting

off that daze, he targeted the beak-like nose, hammering it until blood gushed out, spattering Bryce.

Salmon, with blood running down his shirt front, began to pant like a wind-broken horse. His long swings suddenly lost steam, while Bryce, who was fifteen years younger and as hard as ironwood, seemed to grow stronger. Salmon began to retreat. Hugh Bryce realized that Salmon was not half as hard as he looked and with Clemmie Orr's howl of pain still in his ears, Hugh deliberately landed on spots where it would hurt most.

Unexpectedly, Salmon, unable or unwilling to stand any more, whirled to dash for the gun-belt Bryce had dropped. Bryce, caught flat-footed, followed but he was unable to switch readily from fighting to running and he knew it would be close. Salmon had only to whip up the belt and fire through the end of the holster.

Then Eb Staghorn was there, a huge, slightly grizzled black bear, with fleshy lips and nose and a horse-tail mustache. Staghorn put one big foot on the holstered weapon and shoved Salmon in the chest, sending him staggering back.

"It's not worth killing a man over, quarrelin' over how to whup a blasted kid," Staghorn remarked. "But you ortn't use a club on Clemmie, Dake. Liable to cripple him so he won't be no good to do chores. A strap's the thing to keep a boy in line."

Salmon, his craggy face bloody and cut and bruised, his big body weaving, glared at Hugh. "By God," he threatened, "I'll git you, Bryce. I'll kill you sometime."

"I wouldn't do it, Dake," said Staghorn in a matter-of-fact voice. "You kill this young feller and you know what'll happen? You'll have Bravo Bryce over here from Texas to get you for killin' his cub. And you'd have no chance ag'in Bravo. He could bury a dozen like you, Dake. He's buried fifty hard cases, Injun, Mex, white, that was really bad—not a imitation like you."

THAT shut up Salmon. Helped by a beanpole, who called himself Red Cartry, he went to the spring to wash his bloody face, while Bryce used his neckerchief as sponge. Then picking up the six-shooter belt, Bryce buckled it on again. Queer, he was thinking with a deep pride, how abruptly Salmon had quieted just at the mention of Bravo's name. But many a ruffian would have quieted in the same way. In the West, there was no other man who had quite the fame of Bravo Bryce who for nearly twenty years had been a ranger in Texas and before that an Indian fighter and Confederate cavalryman during the Civil War. An almost incredible figure, performing incredible deeds, begun when, as a twelve-year-old boy, Bravo had fought through a campaign against the Comanches. His Indian fighting after he had joined the rangers had been a steady affair, interrupted only by the Civil War, after which he had returned to serve in the rangers again, rising soon to a captaincy.

Coming from the spring, Cartry and Dake Salmon saddled and rode away. The pair had come to the Staghorn ranch a month before, to do a little riding occasionally for the rancher. Bryce's eyes followed them until they jogged out of sight.

"Dake will forget it," remarked Staghorn. "Dake ain't one to hold a grudge."

"It won't worry me if he holds it," stated Hugh and chatted for another half hour with the rancher. He had been a friend of Staghorn's since the Texan had settled at Pinole Springs and had ridden over to visit Hugh, to tell him that he had known Bravo Bryce in Texas, riding for five years as ranger in the company Bravo Bryce captained.

Which had been enough for Hugh. Any friend of his father's was his friend likewise. When the rest of the Animas Valley looked with suspicion on Staghorn, mainly because of the numerous strangers who came to stay for short periods at the Staghorn ranch, Hugh defended the Texan. Major Lanham at his fortress-like headquarters, the Logan brothers, Jim Tolleth, Guinn Cryder, all had an idea that Staghorn was operating a rustler outfit. Hugh had disagreed strenuously with them, moved only by the fact that Staghorn was his father's friend.

When he left Staghorn to ride down the canyon finally, he was met by Clemmie who emerged from a thicket alongside the trail.

"You sure kept me from a bad lickin'," Clemmie said gratefully. "Dake might of killed me." The boy had an humble doglike appreciation of favors.

"You better pull out of here, Clemmie," Hugh advised. "I'll give you a job at my place."

The boy's face lighted up at that offer, then he shook his head. "I wouldn't want to quit Eb that-a-way. It wouldn't be right to him. He give me a home back in Texas when I lost my folks and I owe him a lot."

"With all the work you've done, you paid him back long ago. No reason why you should stay here to be knocked around by the hard-cases staying around Eb."

Clemmie shook his head again and Hugh rode on. Clemmie, he guessed, was in part afraid to leave, to risk Staghorn's anger. The rest of his refusal to leave came from the fact that Staghorn had for most of the boy's life provided a home of sorts. Hugh pitied the boy and wanted to help him, but Clemmie would have to muster enough courage to make the break and quit Staghorn's outfit of his own accord.

Spurring on toward his ranch, Hugh thought as he often did of Bravo Bryce. He had seen Bravo but once in the ten years since he had come to Arizona Territory, sent there by Bravo after the death of Hugh's mother to live with the Grosvenors in the south end of the Animas Valley. During those ten years, his father had dropped in for one hasty visit, during a trip to Arizona to return a quartet on the wanted list of the Texas rangers. His father was no letter writer and outside of that visit, Hugh's only contact with Bravo had been in meeting men like Staghorn who had known his father in Texas.

It was a rare month when some transplanted Texan did not come to Hugh, with outstretched hand and the warm greeting, "So you're the son of Bravo Bryce. Mighty glad to meet you, young fella." Often in round-up camps he had heard yarns of the exploits of Captain Bravo Bryce, related by some quiet-speaking old cowhand. All spoke of his father with respect and admiration, and Hugh shone in that reflected glory.

That hero-worship had been a guiding force all his life; had led him at twenty-one to start his own cattle ranch in Fishtail Canyon on the west side of the Animas Valley. It was Wall Grosvenor who had made that start possible.

Grosvenor, once a partner of his father on a Texas ranch, had branded a few heifer calves to Hugh soon after the boy's arrival, and those cattle had increased fast. When he was sixteen, Grosvenor had paid the boy top wages for breaking horses; that money Hugh had used to buy other cattle.

He had four hundred cows now grazing out from his homestead in Fishtail Canyon, the cattle ranging up on the pine-stippled mesas of the Trumbull peak in summer, wintering in the valley. Hugh was prospering fast, buoyed by the feeling that he couldn't fail—not with the blood of Bravo Bryce in him.

CHAPTER II

RETURN OF BRAVO BRYCE

BACK at his ranch under the sycamores in the canyon bottom, he got rid of his blood-spattered clothes and saddled a fresh horse to ride to the Grosvenor ranch. For the trip he was using a three-year-old chestnut gelding he had been breaking for Ann Grosvenor. The colt made little fuss as Bryce drew up the cinches; he was gentle and had had four saddles.

Habit alone made Bryce carry his Winchester shoved in the scabbard as he took the trail across the grassy oval of the Animas Valley. Save for small scale raids, Apaches had been quiet for several years. General Crook had ringed them in with a chain of army posts, knit together by telegraph and filled with hard-bitten mounted troops led by officers who had learned Indian fighting the hard way.

As he rode Bryce surveyed the country and whistled a tune he often had heard Ann Grosvenor play on her square piano. To the south, over a dry waste that always gave the appearance of a lake, a plume of smoke was lifting from a crawling train on the recently built railroad. West on Major Lanham's ranch a local shower was slanting down long dark lines of rain.

Climbing the ridge above Cottonwood Wash, he reined in the chestnut to look down the wash, where a buckboard with two passengers was drawn along rapidly by a pair of bright bay trotters. That would be one of Wall Grosvenor's prize buggy teams, and the flash of red color would be a neckerchief around the soft throat of Ann Grosvenor. The other passenger would be Wall Grosvenor; Ann often drove for her father.

The rig with the father and daughter was traveling straight up the wash. Watching

the vehicle, Bryce noticed suddenly a wisp of smoke rising from the other side of a neighboring ridge to the one he was on, smoke so colorless as to be almost lost in the bright sun. Undoubtedly that meant a branding fire, and the Grosvenors were headed straight for it. Bryce sent the chestnut lunging forward in a stiff-legged run, on a course toward the thin pencil of smoke.

He pulled down when he was in the tall mesquites of the ridge for a look-see. Below him two men in a little open space of the thick mesquite brush were squatted over a small fire. Their saddled horses, a blaze-faced sorrel and a roan, were ground-reined nearby. He identified the two as Red Cartry and Dake Salmon who had ridden away from Staghorn's two hours before. Near the fire lying on the ground hogtied was a calf. The cow to which the calf belonged was close and wore the Grosvenor Double Diamond brand. It was easy to guess what the men were up to; they would hair-brand the Grosvenor calf, to be picked up and changed to some rustler brand after weaning.

The men at the branding fire had not seen the rider on the ridge, but they heard the rattle of wheels and beat of the hoofs of the Grosvenor team. One, carrying a rifle in the crook of his arm, walked a few yards down the wash. As the buckboard came nearer, he yelled and waved his arm, an imperious sweep which carried a well-known meaning in that part of Arizona Territory—a plain order to approaching parties to keep away.

It was a command that was generally obeyed but the Grosvenor rig came straight up on the draw, turning only to avoid mesquite clumps.

Hugh Bryce, leaning forward in his saddle, swore softly; it was like Wall Grosvenor and his daughter to defy the threat represented by the rustlers. Grosvenor had settled in the Animas when Apaches ran wild over Arizona, and having survived those bloody times, he was not to be turned back now from investigating a branding on his range by strangers.

The second man, carrying a long-barreled rifle, joined the first just as his companion was lifting his gun to his shoulder. Maybe they intended to send a first shot as warning, but if the rig kept on, other shots would be fired to hit the horses or even the two people in the buckboard.

Bryce was taking no chances on that. He whipped out the Winchester, reflecting that the only cartridges he carried were in the magazine, and fired quickly over the heads of the rustlers. At the explosion the chestnut under him bolted, racing through mesquite that rasped and tore at the rider's bull-hide leggings. He fought the colt and managed to head him toward the fire.

This blind charge on a fear-crazed horse wasn't the smartest way to attack, but he judged it was just what Bravo Bryce would have done. It drew the pair's attention from the rig, and they turned on him to fire half a dozen rapid shots. In the thick high fine-leaved mesquite brush, the horse and his rider made poor targets.

CHECKING the colt finally, Bryce got out another shot. That second explosion close to the chestnut's head made the terrified horse really stampede, but Bryce kept him in the general direction of the fire, making enough noise for a cavalry charge. It bluffed the rustlers; they got their horses, racing back up the canyon in a precipitous flight.

Which was lucky for Bryce since in the open spaces near the fire, the chestnut suddenly began to pitch, and Hugh was too busy riding to use the Winchester. He kept his spur rowels away from the shining coat of the animal. The chestnut wasn't to blame —that Winchester must have sounded like a cannon in the sensitive ears. By the time he had the horse calmed, the Grosvenors had driven as close to the fire as the buckboard could get from the brush. Leaving his daughter holding the bays, Wall Grosvenor climbed out to examine the calf, a heifer tied with a rawhide piggin string. A short curved iron lay heating in the coals of the fire.

Hugh got down from his horse and stirred the fire to a cherry red, using the iron to burn Grosvenor's brand on the calf's shoulder. Then he cut an underslope in the left ear, a swallow fork in the right, and turned the calf loose.

Strands of burnished copper hair curling out from her black flat-crowned sombrero, Ann Grosvenor sat in the seat of the rig. She was easily the prettiest girl in the Ani-

mas. She smiled at Hugh as he straightened.

His return smile was a little grim; he had noted that Grosvenor was totally unarmed. It had been plain loco for him to risk his own and his daughter's life. Grosvenor was nearly sixty and his string of years was mostly lived out, but Ann was only twenty. Had there been no third party to interfere, Salmon and Cartry might have murdered the two in the buckboard, making it appear the work of Apache renegades. From what Hugh had seen of the pair at Eb Staghorn's, they had about as much mercy as could be found in bronco Apaches.

"This sort of thing has got to stop," said Grosvenor.

"Yes," Bryce agreed quietly. "But it won't stop through driving up on rustlers without even a gun on you. You can afford to lose a few calves, but you and Ann have only one life apiece. Those two are the breed that might have shot you both."

"You know them then?" asked Grosvenor.

Bryce, without replying, went to his horse.

"Some of Eb Staghorn's short men, I guess," Grosvenor said bitterly.

"Short men" was a common term in Arizona Territory. It described riders who drifted into a community from nowhere, generally leaving outlaw records behind them and staying for a brief period before leaving as mysteriously as they had appeared. The term might have come from the fact that such men, fearing pursuit of the law, stayed only a short time in one place or maybe it had been given them because they were the sort destined to live but a short time. Short men often turned to rustling which might lead to a warning from ranchers to hit the trail, or to a shoot out and stones piled over otherwise unmarked graves. The renegades known as short men didn't often surrender themselves for hanging.

"You'd better hire some young men to ride with Serrano and Pasqual," he advised Grosvenor. "They're getting too old to keep your calves branded up." Grosvenor shrugged off the advice; most of his interest lay in his Steeldust riding horses and fancy buggy teams.

"We were driving over to invite you for supper, Hugh," called Ann Grosvenor. "Maria is cooking a very special meal."

"I was on my way over to eat it; the wind has been blowing from Maria's kitchen all day," he joked as he rode close to the buckboard. "Afraid I ruined this colt for you, Ann—shooting from his back. He won't be safe for a woman for a long time. After this if anybody just says 'gun' around him he'll go crazy."

"You can't scare me into letting you have that Jamie colt," the girl returned spiritedly. "I'll spell out 'gun' if I have to say it around him. But we've got something more than Maria's supper to offer you—a surprise."

"What is it?"

She laughed, and her gray eyes held dancing lights. "If I told you, it wouldn't be any surprise, would it? You'll have to wait."

He trailed the buckboard as the Grosvenors headed down the wash to swing toward the south end of the valley, talking to calm the nervous, sweating chestnut. As he rode, he kept his eyes on Ann Grosvenor, letting the bright bays step along fast, their legs pistoning swiftly and cleanly, leaving a little wake of crushed grass behind the spinning wheels.

Swinging about a high ridge, they came to the Grosvenor ranch, sitting under the scattered pines of a little bench above the valley. The original house had been a two-story block of adobe. A new house had been built since, higher on the bench, a U-shaped rambling residence of reddish adobe. Directly below the old house was a diamond-shaped corral of solid adobe walls topped by cedar spikes.

Old Serrano's grandson, Pancho, came running out to take the bay team. Hugh put the chestnut into a stall, unsaddled, and after wiping the sweat-soaked hide dry, followed the Grosvenors to the house.

In the patio, paved with flat stones, a man sat in an easy chair, with a bottle of whiskey at his elbow. Hugh Bryce stopped, startled, staring hard for a moment before a grin widened his face. For the man who got up from the chair to stand tall and erect, handsome, sharply trimmed yellow beard matching long yellow wavy hair, the latter carrying no apparent trace of gray, was Hugh's father, Bravo Bryce. His garb was fitted

for hard use, with a certain added elegance. The cartridge belt was silver ornamented, the shirt and breeches of fine material, the boots tailored like gloves. With another man the long hair and clothing would have been the showy badge of the Western showman, but in Bravo Bryce they went with the flamboyant, reckless bravery he had shown in dozens of battles with red and white renegades.

HUGH, his brown face stretched in a wide smile, stepped quickly forward. Bravo Bryce put his arms around Hugh, holding him for a moment in the affectionate embrace of a Mexican *hacendado.*

Then, "Son," he said in his deep warm voice and shook Hugh's hand, keeping his left arm over Hugh's shoulder.

At the word, ten years were wiped out for Hugh Bryce, and the day of his mother's funeral was but yesterday. On that day his father had also said goodbye to his son, putting him on a stagecoach to make his home with Bryce's former ranch partner, Wall Grosvenor, in Arizona Territory. The boy had strained his eyes from the rocking Concord, watching until it was only a speck in the distance, the splendid figure of the man he literally worshiped.

"I've missed you, Hughie," Bravo declared. "It's been six years since I saw you. You've grown into a man. A man to be proud of. Wall tells me you've started a ranch of your own."

"A little place, sir," said Hugh. He had been proud of that ranch in Fishtail Canyon, but now it seemed almost too small to mention to his father who had two years ago resigned from the rangers to become partner in a huge ranch on the Staked Plains.

Almost tongue-tied with surprise and pleasure he kept his eyes on his father as they ate supper. Bravo Bryce quietly monopolized the talk, telling of adventures in mesquite and tornillo thickets, unreeling a drama of battles. He could not have asked for a better audience: his son, a pretty young girl, an old friend. Bravo did not boast, he merely told lightly one hair-breadth adventure after another. He did not have to brag or exaggerate; rather he gave the impression of understating. He was simply one of those few men who had never known fear, and what he had done had been merely a job.

Hugh had been in one gun battle in his life; between cowboys and a band of Chiricahua warriors who had run off some of Major Lanham's horses. He and four of the Lanham cowboys had followed the band to run into an ambush. Two of the cowboys had been killed and Hugh had shot one of the red renegades before his own horse had been killed under him. For Bravo of course that battle would have been too trivial to be worth relating. Bravo's whole life had been one long record of hair-breadth escapes from death. He had half a dozen bullet wounds.

Hugh left late to ride through the dark, quiet valley, with the cottonwoods marking Major Lanham's headquarters towering dimly in the distance. Bravo had promised to come to visit Hugh's ranch at the first opportunity. Hugh was a little hurt that Bravo was staying with the Grosvenors, but his little house he admitted was hardly suitable to entertain Bravo.

It was almost one o'clock when he reached his ranch. Riding up out of a rocky arroyo he smelled smoke in the air, mixed with the odor of burned leather and cloth. At once he was on the alert. Apache raiders were fond of leaving burned ranchhouses as their calling cards. He pulled up his horse, sliding the Winchester from the scabbard.

The marauders, however, had visited the ranchhouse hours before. Where the house had stood now were only the roofless walls of the two rooms, and within them a smoking heap of his few possessions. He had left no fire in the stove so the fire could be no accident. Almost any rancher in the Territory would have suspected Apaches, but Hugh knew better. No Indians had been here; the house had been burned by Carry and Salmon in revenge.

CHAPTER III

TWO KINDS OF RANCHERS

HUGH BRYCE with the smoke of his burned house in his nostrils was just as foolhardy and reckless in his anger as Grosvenor had been that afternoon. He was going to have a settlement with the mis-

creants; he would have it if twenty men instead of two had burned his place. He bedded down in a shed with his saddle blankets and at the first morning light picked up, as he had expected, the trail of two horses.

The riders had not headed for Staghorn's, however; the tracks led toward Strode Wells. He followed the trail at a lope, keeping it until he was in the little railroad town.

A saloon man told him that Cartry and Salmon had been there the night before and had announced they were taking the night train for California. The ticket agent said the two had bought tickets for Los Angeles, taking with them their sacked saddles. The two horses had been left in a corral.

That ended the chase for Bryce. He had no time to follow the pair to California. He headed back for the valley, taking a steep trail over the range that would drop him into Staghorn's. He had a bone to pick with the rancher.

Above the ranch he met Clemmie Orr, moving a bunch of mares and colts up canyon. The horses were new arrivals. Riders often brought horses to the Staghorn place, pasturing them awhile, and taking them away again. Some of the Animas ranchers claimed that Staghorn's outfit was nothing more than a relay station for horse thieves.

He pulled up in front of the house where a Grosvenor horse wearing a fancy silver-mounted saddle stood with grounded reins. The saddle Hugh identified as his father's.

A gangling youth, Bill Peters, and two strangers were squatted on the shady side of the house playing poker. Inside he found Bravo Bryce and Eb Staghorn with a bottle of Irish whiskey sitting on the table between them.

"Been hearing about you, son, from my old amigo Eb here," Bravo greeted Hugh. "He says you're a real rancher and no better rider in the country."

"Yeah?" Hugh said shortly. He was still on the prod. "Maybe Eb can explain why two of his men burned down my house last night—I mean Salmon and Cartry."

"Surely they couldn't of done that," said Staghorn, startled. "Them boys wouldn't pull such a lowdown onary trick on a neighbor of mine. Course Salmon might still of been pawin' dirt over that beatin' you handed him."

"That wasn't all he had against me. Grosvenor and Ann caught Salmon and Cartry branding one of his calves yesterday. They warned the Grosvenors to stay away, but Grosvenor didn't turn. Salmon and Cartry were going to open fire when I sent a shot from the ridge. They did a little wild shooting and rode up canyon in a hurry. When I got to my place last night, my house was burned down. I followed tracks of two riders to Strode this morning; found they were Salmon and Cartry. They'd taken the train to California."

"That shore shocks me," said Eb. "They was just a couple of Texas boys that come along here, and I give 'em a little work breaking horses. I never told 'em to do no branding of other folks' calves. They come in yesterday evenin' 'bout dark and shoved off a little later. They didn't say nothin' about no fuss with you or Grosvenor. I shore don't want no trouble with my neighbors."

"If you mean that," Hugh said sharply, "you'd better be more careful what men you take in here. And give them orders to quit brandin' other people's stock."

Staghorn colored angrily, but Bravo interposed.

"Now, now, son," he said jovially, "that's no way to talk to my old amigo. Eb and me, we went through too much together down on the border for him and my son to quarrel. Eb saved my bacon more'n once."

"I don't blame the young'un for bein' on the warpath," said Staghorn. "Have a drink, Hugh. If your house got burned, you're welcome to camp here with me."

"I'm building again right away," said Hugh. Before leaving Strode Wells he had hired a couple of Mexicans to come out to make adobes for another house.

"Yessir," stated Bravo pouring out another drink, "I've knowed Eb Staghorn most of my life, and I know he's the kind to ride a river with. Him and me swum a lot of bad rivers together. You couldn't have a better neighbor, Hughie."

Hugh Bryce's anger vanished. He was the hero-worshiping boy again, and if his father said Staghorn was all right, that was enough. Staghorn could have had nothing to do with the house burning or the brand-

ing of Grosvenor's calf; those things had been Salmon's and Carry's ideas. Men like Major Lanham who talked against Staghorn were just griping without reason.

Hugh, after a little exchange of talk, rose to go. His father, after finishing the bottle, joined him outside.

"I was aiming to come up to see your place, Hugh, but if your house was burned, no use of that now. I'm due in Tucson and I'll head there by way of Grosvenor's. I'll ride up valley a piece with you."

"Glad to have you," said Hugh.

"I might not go back to Texas," stated Bravo as the two rode away together. "Maybe you've heard I was partners with an Englishman on a big ranch over on the Staked Plains. We quarreled and I pulled out. That blamed Britisher was always interferin'. He had a lot of fool notions. For one thing, he wanted to spend a lot of money having bulls shipped clear from England. Hell, any bull is good enough, long as he can get calves."

HUGH said nothing to that. For years he had heard Major Lanham and Wall Grosvenor preach fervently against scrub sires and import Durham and Hereford bulls to breed out the longhorn strain. The resulting calves had proved the value of their theories. Bravo simply didn't know ranching if he thought scrub bulls were good enough. There was no profit in raising scrub cattle.

"I could use a few hundred dollars, Hugh, if you got it handy," remarked Bravo. "I've taken a job temporarily with the express company, with Arizona and New Mexico as my territory, but what I'm really out here for is to look over ranches. If I can find the right location, I can get a lot of money to start a big outfit. If you can spare me say five hundred dollars now, I'd appreciate it."

"I can give you the money," said Hugh promptly. "But if you're hunting a location for a ranch, why not go in with me here in the Animas? I've got four hundred pretty good cows; I know where I can get a few hundred head more cheap. That could make a good start for us. I've got enough range for around three thousand head."

His father smiled, the same smile he had used years ago in listening absent-mindedly to his five-year-old son's account of rides on his pony. It was the tolerant good humor of a big man for a small boy's affairs. Bravo still thought of Hugh as a boy.

"That sounds like a small ranch to you, I know," he said, flushing. "But we could build up fast."

"Yes, we could," admitted Bravo. "But I never liked to start small, Hughie. I wouldn't be interested in anything unless it was big. I'm heading for Tucson today, and while I'm doing a little detective work for the express company, I'm going to look over a piece of land on the Border. Some Texas rancher friends would trail in ten thousand head for me. Now is the time to get hold of a big chunk of range. I've thought over this Animas Valley; it could easily hold ten times what it runs now. Staghorn and I been talkin' it over. I could use Staghorn's ranch as headquarters for ten thousand cows to begin with."

Hugh was silent, but he realized what that would mean—range crowding, conflicts with Lanham, Grosvenor, the Logan brothers and the other ranchers who had pioneered the Animas. The result would be to overstock the valley, ruin the grass.

Where the trail branched off to Hugh's ranch, Bravo pulled up. "When can you get me that money, Hugh?"

"I'll write you an order on the Volney Store in Strode Wells for it. Jim Volney does the banking for this country."

"It's not easy for a father to ask a son for money, but it's only a temporary loan," said Bravo as Hugh wrote a check on a page torn from his tally book. "I know a hundred people in Texas who would send it to me, but I'm in a hurry for it. Time means money to me. You'll find that out, Hughie, when you get to managing big affairs."

Given the order, Bravo rode on while Hugh returning to his place, harnessed a work team and began grading a level place on the bench for the new house. It was a site he had picked for the house where he hoped to bring Ann Grosvenor some day as his wife. Ann Grosvenor had helped him select it. At the time he had hinted he planned to have her occupy it when he had his ranch well established, but Ann Grosvenor had kept him somehow from asking her outright if she would marry him. He

had a feeling she hadn't made up her mind about him. And yet she had known him since he was a small boy; she should know by now if she thought enough of him to marry him.

He had given his father half his available cash, and he would have to draw in his horns on what he had planned to build—two small rooms and a big living room with a curly quartz fireplace to give Ann an idea of what their home could be. Now he would have to build another shack.

He had come to the Grosvenors when he was twelve, Ann ten. Ann's mother had been their school teacher in the ranch-house until the death of Mrs. Grosvenor; after that Ann had been sent away to a convent school. Sometimes the girl treated him like a brother and sometimes she made fun of him. But at other times her smile was warm and her eyes had glowed, looking at him.

The Mexicans arrived next morning to begin their adobe making, puddling clay and water in a pit with their bare feet and laying out rows of bricks to dry in the sun. It was two days later that Major Lanham rode in. Lanham was a grizzled veteran of the Civil War, an officer who had earned his commissions by action under fire. A solid chunk of a man with a gruff driving way, he was unpopular in the Animas.

He looked over the wreck of the burned house. "Heard you got burned out by Staghorn's outfit," he said curtly.

"I got burned out by two men who were staying with Staghorn," Hugh corrected him. "They left the country."

"There'll be others taking their place, as long as Staghorn is in the country. He's had a lot of short men stay with him since he settled. And all of them have worked on our stock."

"I've kept track of my calves," said Hugh. "They got none of mine."

"Maybe not. Eb knows you have only a few to look after, but I've lost plenty cattle and some good horses. We can't have Staghorn's kind in the Animas. Came in here without a cow, and yet he's got a big bunch of stock wearing his brand. Anyone could tell by looking at his yearlings that most of them are from my cows. But that's not enough in court," added Lanham bitterly. "Staghorn's made too many friends around Strode Wells for a jury to convict him."

Bryce nodded agreement. Lanham would find it hard to get a conviction against a rustler working on his cattle. Lanham had served notice that he would send to Yuma Prison anyone he caught working on his stock. Which didn't set well; Arizonans had the free and easy notion that a hungry man was entitled to eat other people's beef.

"I'm at the end of my patience," growled Lanham. "If the law won't get rid of Staghorn and his cussed short men, I'll stop 'em another way. I've got eight cowboys that have fought Apaches. The Logans and Guinn Cryder said they'd join me. I could count on Grosvenor."

"If you're asking me to join in wiping out Staghorn," said Hugh, "I'm not with you."

Lanham's reddish face turned a shade darker. "There's just two kinds of ranchers in the Animas," he said deliberately. "Two of Staghorn's men burned your house after you and Grosvenor caught them red-handed, rustling. If Staghorn was driven out, you could take over his range. You're the sort of neighbor I want. I'll sell you three hundred heifers you can pay for from their calves."

Lanham was offering Hugh a bribe for his help, although he'd want top price for the heifers. If he took the offer, however, it would save Hugh several years in building up his herd, cut short the time until he could ask Ann Grosvenor to marry him.

BRYCE shook his head. He was the son of Bravo Bryce, who had ridden most of his life to enforce the law. Bravo wouldn't want his son helping wipe out a neighbor suspected of stealing. And Hugh patterned his life after his father's.

Lanham's anger boiled up at the refusal. "I've got a boomerang corral at Palo Verde Springs where part of your cattle water. I've told my men to let your stock water there, but don't expect that favor in the future."

"All right," Bryce returned. "And don't expect me to shove your strays back from the mountains."

"My men will do that for me, by God," snarled Lanham and rode off rowelling his horse hard.

CHAPTER IV

HOLD-UP AT RANSOM

THREE days later Clemmie Orr rode up to Hugh's camp under the live oaks where he had fashioned a shelter of cedar poles with a tarpaulin roof. The Mexicans had finished making adobes and had gone home to let the stacks of bricks cure before starting the house.

Hugh was not surprised to see Clemmie; the boy dropped into Hugh's camp whenever he had a chance, to escape the tormenting he received at Staghorn's. The boy grinned now as Hugh hoorahed him on the old gray gelding he rode. "Five new men rode in last night," he said. "About all the tough Texans that ever come to Arizona I guess has stopped with Staghorn, but these look exter tough. Some day Staghorn's liable to set a bunch of them birds to grabbin' this whole Animas Valley."

"That will be quite a grab," said Hugh, but he recalled his father's talk.

"Them five brung in near a hundred horses," said Clemmie. "Good ones. I reckon you could buy some of 'em mighty cheap."

"I don't need horses," Hugh said shortly. "Not that kind anyway." Ten to one those horses had been stolen out of New or old Mexico. Horses were scarce in the Southwest and had a ready sale since Apaches in former years had swept many ranches clean of saddle stock. Small bands of warriors had each used up hundreds of horses in a raid that might stretch out a thousand miles or more.

So far, few Animas horses had been reported stolen, although there were a lot of good horses in the valley, all of the ranchers having gone into raising of saddle stock. Major Lanham had several hundred head. Wall Grosvenor had nearly as many, using Kentucky and Steeldust stallions to cross with selected mustang mares. Fearing Indians, the Animas ranchers usually kept their horses close to headquarters, where they could be run quickly into walled corrals.

"Clemmie," advised Hugh, "you'd better break away from that Staghorn bunch. They are due to get into serious trouble sooner or later, and if you're caught with 'em, you'll be branded with the same iron."

"Staghorn kin look after himself," said the boy with a touch of pride. "Eb treats me good—sometimes anyway. It ain't me I'm worried about. It's you. Your dad rode in yesterday and has been drinkin' steady and playin' poker ever since. Lost about all the money he had to that Peters card slick stayin' with Eb. And he's so drunk he's sick. That hawg pen's no place for him. But don't tell Staghorn I tole you your dad was there. I'm s'posed to be up in Eagle Canyon hunting horses."

Hugh had heard occasional stories about Bravo and liquor. Bravo's drinking had been in the same epic strain as his other feats—yarns in which Bryce had spent all night in a saloon, downing drink after drink, and showing no trace of liquor. There seemed no special purpose in that sort of drinking except on one occasion when Bravo had drunk into a helpless stupor a desperado who had said he never would be taken alive by the rangers.

Telling Clemmie to ride on his horse hunt, he saddled to head for Staghorn's. Coming into the ranch, he found four strangers in a corral cutting out horses for a Mexican buyer. Riding past them, he came to the jacal-like house. His father was inside, sitting alone at a table with a jug at his elbow. Bravo was glassy-eyed; only after staring hard at Hugh a half minute was he able to identify his son. Then tears appeared in Bravo's eyes.

"There he is," he said thickly. "My own flesh and blood an' I been separated from him for ten years."

"You haven't been up to see my ranch yet, Dad," said Hugh. "I'd like to show it to you. Why not ride there now?"

Bravo considered this with a drunken gravity.

"I'm most too busy," he said. "Been here visitin' and talkin' with my old amigo, Eb Staghorn. Me and Eb, we both left Texas to come to Arizona to make a fresh start. Both of us—make new beginnin'—get rich—and you'll be with us in it, Hughie," he promised. "We'll cut you in on something big. Tell you 'bout it later."

He started to get up, but fell to the floor, to lie there paralyzed. Hugh helped him to his feet and holding an arm, got him to a corral where he saddled Bravo's

horse. Once in the saddle, Bravo kept his seat, although he swayed as the horse jogged under him.

They rode to Hugh's camp where Hugh cooked a huge pot of black coffee. Bravo drank a few cups and then collapsing to a cot whined for more whiskey. Hugh gave him a little, and then when Bravo finally slept soddenly, Hugh sat looking at him.

He never had imagined Bravo Bryce like this. Bravo, he guessed, had lost in the poker game all the money Hugh had loaned him. Hugh didn't mind that and certainly Bravo could be excused for drinking a little too much occasionally, after all the hell he had gone through as ranger.

He kept Bravo at his camp for two days before the shaky fits passed and the man finally got back to something like normal. He had to go to Tucson again, he stated, on express company business, and Hugh rode with him as far as the Grosvenors. By that time his father was himself again —making gallant speeches to Ann, talking of old days to Grosvenor. Then he rode away, raising dust to Strode Wells where he would take the train to Tucson.

Ann Grosvenor looking at Hugh, gazing after his father, smiled a little. "You know, Hugh," she said. "I could almost shake you sometimes—the way you look at Bravo. As if the world turned around him."

"I don't understand what you mean," he mumbled, taken aback.

"You seem to forget that you got to make good on your own merits. I know," she went on hurriedly, "you never bragged about having Bravo Bryce for a father, but down deep it's always been in you—that you were the son of a famous man, and that made you wonderful, too. You should admire him, of course. He has done splendid things. But he is Bravo Bryce, while you're Hugh Bryce. You've got to stand on your own feet."

He flushed deeply. The girl was saying exactly what Hugh had thought of Clemmie, that Clemmie would have to get strong enough to stand by himself; to quit Staghorn of his own accord. To have that told to him now was hard to take.

"I just wonder," Ann remarked. "Suppose you discovered that Bravo wasn't quite as wonderful as you think. He's a good friend of Eb Staghorn's. Suppose Bravo wanted you to throw in with Staghorn—what would you do?"

He recalled Major Lanham and his remarks that there were only two kinds of ranchers in the Animas. "Have you heard talk that I might throw in with Staghorn?"

"There never will be such talk around me," she flashed. "I know you too well for that. But I want you to believe in yourself, as Hugh Bryce; not as the son of Bravo Bryce. You're going to be the big man in this valley some day. Suppose you found out that your god had clay feet?"

Often women, he had heard, possessed an intuition that saw below the surface, but his father had no clay feet. A little too much drinking—what did that matter? That was a small weakness.

He rode back to his ranch slowly, anger smoldering in him. Ann Grosvenor had been warning him against Bravo's influence. As if Bravo was liable to lead him into something dishonorable. That was in a way an insult to Bravo and he didn't like it, coming even from Ann.

Clemmie Orr loped in two days later, in the late afternoon. "I got to tell someone," he blurted out in a scared voice. "Somebody ort to know."

"Know what?"

"They're going to hold up a passenger train; rob the express safe. Staghorn and six men. They got word from Tucson a big shipment of money is coming from the East on the passenger tonight. Over fifty thousand dollars. I slept outdoors last night; them new fellers knocked me around too much. I heard 'em plannin' it. I ain't stayin' around no bunch that holds up trains."

"You can stay here or go over to the Grosvenors."

The boy shivered. "I'm afeared to stay that close to that outfit. If they guessed I'd heard 'em and told on 'em, they'd twist my neck like I was a sick chicken. I was goin' to keep still about it and just slope outa the country, but I figured you in special ort to know 'bout this hold-up."

Hugh turned cold as ice suddenly. He looked at Clemmie. "You mean Bravo is going with them? Is that it?"

The boy nodded. "They begun makin'

plans as soon as he rode in from Tucson. He brung word about that shipment."

HUGH stood dazed, silent. His father turning bandit! Silently he cursed Staghorn. Eb had filled his father so full of liquor that Bravo didn't realize what he was doing. But Hugh knew that was wrong. Bravo Bryce knew well enough what he was doing. Likely he had taken that express job so he could learn about a big shipment of money. Something crumbled in young Hugh Bryce as he stood motionless. There vanished the picture of the gallant ranger captain to whom he had said good-bye in Texas ten years before, the man who had been flawless hero to a small boy. Bravo Bryce, who had captured or killed scores of renegades and had sent other hundreds fleeing from Texas, whose name was a flaming sword to evil-doers, had turned outlaw.

Getting over the first shock, he got details of the projected hold-up from Clemmie. It was to be staged at Ransom, a small station east of Strode Wells. They would hold up the train at Ransom, cutting loose the express car and engine to run down the track a mile, where they could open the safe undisturbed. They might have to blow open the safe and they wanted plenty of time for the job.

Then riding south toward the Border twenty miles, they were to pick up a second bunch of horses. On these relay mounts, the men were to return to the Animas while the horses they had ridden from the hold-up were to be taken on to the Border by another man, to be turned loose and allowed to scatter.

He looked at the sun, figuring time and distance.

"I'm riding," he told Clemmie. "You go to the Grosvenors and tell them I sent you there to stay. Don't say anything about the hold-up. I'll tend to that."

Walking toward the corral, he thought swiftly. There was in his mind only one thing—to prevent the hold-up and keep his father from the infamy of a part in it. If he rode to the Lanham ranch, Major Lanham would be glad to bring his cowboys to foil the hold-up, but that meant a gun battle, and the certain exposure of Bravo Bryce as one of the bandit crew.

He inched his saddle on a long-legged roan that could lope from sun to sun and would run on after that until he fell dead. Riding south, skirting the dry lake, he headed straight for Ransom, which had been made a station because it had a well providing water that did not ruin engine insides. There was no town—nothing but the depot, water tank, a few shacks for track laborers.

It was twenty-five miles, and the roan had covered them at a swinging lope a little after dark. The train Hugh knew was due in a couple of hours. He had plenty of time. From a ridge he saw a few lights of the town. According to Clemmie's information, the hold-up men would wait at the tank and board the train as it stopped for water. Taking charge they would cut loose the engine and express car, running down the track to the place where they were to leave their horses.

He could ride in to notify the agent to have the train held at a station to the east, but the station was undoubtedly being watched by the waiting men. His appearance would be suspicious and getting himself shot wouldn't stop the robbery.

Tying his horse and scouting through the high mesquite along the track, he located the gang's horses held in a little dip a hundred yards from the track a little over a mile from the station. Moving closer, he saw that one of the men hanging about the Staghorn ranch, Bill Peters, was acting as horse guard, sitting his horse on a low ridge, surveying the country in the light from the stars and fair-sized moon.

Returning for his own horse, he circled to come up an arroyo until he was less than a hundred yards from Peters. Then he again tied his horse and went on foot. He wasn't Bravo Bryce's son now; he was Hugh Bryce, and a Hugh Bryce that was strong enough single-handed to upset the plans of the desperadoes, even though two of them were ex-rangers. His plan was quite simple. In this country they would not dare stage a hold-up without horses. Without horses, their whole plan fell to pieces.

Dismounted, crouched behind a boulder, he fired close to the guard's head. Peter's horse jumped twenty feet, almost throwing rider. Hugh shot again and gave the hooting yell of an Apache, emptying his six-

shooter. Peters evidently had heard a lot about Apaches and all of it had made him panicky. He dug in his spurs, heading for Ransom station with his horse on a dead run, crashing through thickets, making so loud a noise that Hugh chuckled grimly.

Running back to get his horse, he untied the roan and headed toward the bandit horses. Then without dismounting he cut off their saddles, slashing stirrup leathers in addition to cinches. Indians would do that, having no use for heavy stock saddles. Then tying up the bridle reins over the necks of the horses, he headed the animals south across the railway tracks.

By now Peters would have reached Ransom to notify Staghorn and the others that he had been attacked by Apaches and the horses stolen. Hugh would have staked his life on the hold-up being declared off. The men might as well commit the crime manacled and leg-ironed as do it without horses in this country. There were no horses in Ransom that they could take in place of their own. Afoot they could get nowhere. No matter how far they traveled with the engine, they would still be afoot. And as soon as news of the hold-up was broadcast by telegraph, pursuit would make the capture of the hold-up men certain in a few hours.

Yet, to make sure, he watched on a little hill south of the station until the train came in. Taking water, it went on without disturbance, to chug peacefully west.

One man, he judged, would be sent on Peters' horse to get fresh mounts for the gang. But to be on the safe side he took the horses west, paralleling the track, to turn them loose a couple hours after midnight.

He was not far from Strode Wells then and he went on into the town, putting his horse in a livery corral and getting himself a room in the frame hotel near the railroad station. He lay for some time before he slept, thinking of Bravo Bryce. He knew now that he had broken away forever from that idolatry of his childhood. He could see Bravo Bryce as a man who had one quality—bravery to the highest degree—but was a weakling otherwise.

He could now see Bravo Bryce as he really was—liking adventure, excitement, but selfish to the core, sending his son to live with friends, ridding himself of the responsibility for the boy, visiting him but once in ten years. Hugh realized he would have to look after Bravo; see that he kept out of trouble. It was a bitter dose, but it had brought Hugh to man's stature.

CHAPTER V

APACHE ALARM

HE WAS awakened after daylight by an uproar of excited talk in the street below his bedroom window. Apaches were reported to be raiding. Hugh grinned, thinking that he was responsible for that report, but as it developed the talk concerned more than the theft of a few horses. Word had come by telegraph that a big band of warriors had fled San Carlos Reservation. Some seventy bronco Apaches, led it was said by the notorious Go-ya-thle, better known as Geronimo, were loose, riding like the wind, killing and burning, heading toward the Border to begin another inning in the long deadly game played between Apache renegades and the U. S. Army.

Bryce dressed and hurried out. Rumors were various. One was that the outbreak had started with the killing of twenty troopers and several Indian agency civilians after a quarrel over some relatively small matter —maybe the right claimed by Apache warriors to cut off the noses of unfaithful wives. But how the outbreak had started or who led it, there was undoubtedly some seventy warriors, killers armed with good rifles and carrying plenty of ammunition, slipping like elusive ghosts through Southwestern Arizona.

From all army posts available troops were moving to capture the renegades or hamstring their flight until they could be herded back to the reservation. Hours before, news of the outbreak had gone over humming telegraph wires to set thousands of officers, troopers, Apache scouts, civilian scouts and packers into action. It would be a man-killing job in heat and over desert country, and no one knew it better than the Army. The renegades would twist and double, capturing the riding horses to death, massacring all human beings in their path, killing ten whites for every warrior that fell.

Hugh ate breakfast and waited at the

station a few hours to get the operator's latest word on the marauders before returning to the Animas. With troops racing to block all possible routes to the East, the wires suddenly reported that the Indians had outfoxed pursuit to swing southwest again, leaving all their hunters hurrying fruitlessly in the wrong direction.

Contact had been made with the renegades near Torreon Mountain, where a scouting detail had been slashed to ribbons by the red wraiths. Given that location, the Animas Valley plainly lay in the course the renegades were now taking to the south.

Before he left, Hugh secured all the available boxes of ammunition in Strode Wells and headed for the valley on a hard gallop. Arriving at the Grosvenor ranch, he found a dusty activity. Grosvenor and his California cowboys, old Serrano and Pasqual, helped by Ann and Clemmie Orr were driving all the horses into the diamond-shaped stockade. Grosvenor had word of the raid from two soldiers who had been sent from the nearest post, Fort Tomlinson, to advise Grosvenor to come to the fort for safety. Riding at their usual swift pace the Apache band would be due in the Animas Valley some time that day. Grosvenor had refused to go to the fort. On similar Apache raids he had never abandoned his ranch to hunt security; he was not running now.

"But Ann," he remarked to Hugh, "is different. You take her and head out of here," he ordered with a twinkle in his eye.

"All right," returned Hugh. "But tie her to a saddle first. I don't aim to get myself scratched trying to take her."

Out in the middle of the valley clouds of dust were rising, kicked up by horses being driven into the huge corrals of Major Lanham's ranch. To the east similar clouds marked the Cryder and Logan ranches. Other ranches would be hurrying their stock into mountain canyons where it was hoped they would be out of reach of the raiders. Hugh had no such precautions to take; his horses and cattle were already high on Trumbull Mountain.

He helped the Grosvenors pen the horses after which the double gate of the stockade corral was closed and barred with cedar posts. The old ranchhouse with its walls rising two stepped-back stories was being prepared as defense for the corral. Only dynamite or picks and shovels could penetrate the almost windowless and doorless adobe walls of the house, which was in effect a dirt-walled cellar, built above ground. Ann was transferring a supply of water and food from the newer house while Maria cooked meat and bread.

A homesteader neighbor and his small family arrived in a rickety wagon to join the Grosvenors. That made five men at the place and Clemmie, plainly too few to stand attack by seventy crafty warriors. The five couldn't hold out indefinitely, but they hoped to keep up a defense longer than the attackers could afford to stay. Even if the raiders succeeded in taking the horses, it wouldn't be worth the additional time and rest needed to break into the house to slaughter the people in it. The whole strategy of the Apaches was that of swift and constant movement; every hour's halt meant giving time to the pursuing cavalry moving across the checkerboard of Arizona Territory.

Ann Grosvenor hurrying about with the rest suddenly noticed the haggard look on Hugh Bryce's face. "You're not really worried?" she asked. "You know the chances are that they won't come within miles of us, and even if they do, cavalry may be chasing them so close by then that they can't even stop."

"No, it's not the Apaches that's worrying me," he told her.

The girl looked at him sharply. "Then what is it? Your father?" she guessed shrewdly.

He nodded. "You were right about my living on the reputation of Bravo Bryce. I've been like Clemmie Orr. Clemmie was weak enough to need someone outside himself to hold on. For Clemmie it was Staghorn; for me it was my father. I'm still proud of being his son, no matter what he does, but—"

"He's not exactly what you'd been thinking of him?" she asked. "And realizing that has hurt you?"

"It's hurt me, yes. But it's done me a lot of good. You were right about Staghorn, too. He's got to be driven out of the valley. As for my father, I'm taking him to my ranch and keeping him there if I have to hogtie him."

"He won't stay, Hugh. He'll never settle down to the humdrum life of a small ranch. He craves excitement; he's had it too long."

"Maybe," he admitted. "But I'll have to work it out some way so I can look after him."

"That's decent of you, Hugh," she said with a sudden warmth. "Considering how little he's looked after you."

"He did a lot for me—just being my father, making me want to live up to Bravo Bryce. A boy needs a hero to pattern himself after and it's better when that hero is the boy's own father. And regardless of what he does, he'll always be my father. What is in him is in me."

An ominous silence held the valley as the afternoon hours dragged by. The raiders likely would not come through the valley in broad daylight; they would keep to the mountains and strike from cover, but where they might strike was anyone's guess. At any second from the green blanket of junipers and cedars on the rocky ridge might pour a sudden rush of warriors in need of fresh mounts, knowing the Grosvenor horses ridden in relay would serve them for several hundred miles.

Every second of the afternoon the people at Wall Grosvenor's ranch kept on the alert, maintaining close guard on the ridges. Despite their anxiety, they laughed and hoorawed one another, but they never laid down their rifles and they never relaxed their vigilance. Seventy warriors could appear in a second; sweep up to the corral and house in a few more. One second's lost time could mean disaster when Apache lightning struck.

The sun lowering to the rims of Trumbull Peak disappeared just as a horseman from the Lanham ranch came riding on a long lope across the valley. Nearer he was revealed as John Turley, grizzled range foreman for Major Lanham.

"All over," he reported. "The devils done turned east again. Slipped past Captain Kelsey on Tortugas Creek. He had an ambush laid for 'em, but they smelled it out."

That would put the renegades sixty miles away. They could never reach the Animas now; too many soldiers would be blocking the way.

Turley loped back toward Lanham's and at the Grosvenor ranch the tension eased. They ate supper while a soft afterglow filled the sky. Then with the danger over, the men headed for the corral to turn out the penned horses just as another single rider, Bravo Bryce, flashed out from the brush of the ridge to the west. He came on fast, riding with a grace that stood out in a country of horsemen. Pulling up by the corral, he seemed to weave in the saddle a moment before he caught himself and sat erect again.

Planted in his saddle, to Hugh for a short moment his father was the old Bravo Bryce, the reckless ranger who once had led three men against forty Comanche warriors, charging them full-tilt, and waving as if to other imaginary men to follow him, so confidently that the Indians had fled.

"Keep those horses in, Wall!" Bravo ordered sharply.

Grosvenor was startled. "But we had word that Apaches were sixty miles away."

"It's not the Apaches. Keep them in or you'll lose every head. It's white raiders I'm talking about. Thirty men are going to sweep the valley clean of horses. Listen—"

Out of the valley came a sudden distant rattle, harsh sounding despite its faintness.

Bravo nodded his head. "That means they've jumped Lanham."

"Who' jumped the Major?" demanded Grosvenor and made a quick guess. "Staghorn?"

"Staghorn and thirty like him. Most of the short men who came to stay with Eb on his ranch this last year. He sent word some time ago for them to come back. Wanted them to help him grab the Animas by starting a range war on you ranchers, planning to crowd you out by throwing thousands of cattle in on you. His plans are changed now. He's leaving but when he goes he intends for the Animas to remember him. He's aiming to run all the horses in the valley into Mexico and he's not caring how much killing he has to do to get them. The governor of Sonora is a friend of Eb's and you won't be able to touch him once he's across the line. Eb and his bunch want your horses bad, Wall. You've got the choicest lot in the valley, and Eb's going to have them. Either

shove those horses back into the mountains or get ready to fight."

"We'll leave 'em in the corral and fight," decided Grosvenor. "How come Eb to tell you his plans?" asked the rancher with a natural suspicion of the report Bryce had brought.

Bravo waved his hand, dismissing the question. "No matter how I know Eb's plans. I'm warning you. Keep those horses in and get ready for a battle."

CHAPTER VI

LAST FIGHT OF BRAVO BRYCE

HUGH guessed that Staghorn, desperate when the express robbery had failed, had gone beserk. With the fortune in that express safe, Staghorn, helped by a gunman crew, could have bought enough cattle to crowd out established ranchers' herds and could have made a grab for the whole Animas.

"You had a run in with Eb?" Hugh asked when he and his father were alone.

"Yeah. We had quite a ruckus today. I tried to talk Eb out of this horse-stealin' raid, but Eb was loco-crazy. The chances were fifty to one against the Apaches coming here and he knew Lanham and his neighbors as soon as they got word that the Apache raid was over would be off guard.

"That was when he planned to strike, figuring that all the horses would be gathered in corrals for him. Judging by the short time the shooting down the valley lasted, he caught Lanham flat-footed. Cryder and the Logans too. Eb sent a few men to clean up on them.

Hugh, like Grosvenor, was still suspicious of the message that Bravo had brought. "How did you get away from Eb?" he asked.

"Eb thought I was drunk, but he didn't trust me after I argued strong against this raid. They took my gun and left Red Cartry at the ranch to watch me when they rode off. I got Red to drinking and made a try for his pistol. He hit me over the head with a chunk of stovewood before I could shoot him. Come here as fast as I could then to warn Wall. Eb will know that the shooting at Lanham's will warn Grosvenor something is wrong and he can't hope to pull a surprise here. But Eb he'll have something else figured out."

The Grosvenor ranch got ready to meet the new threat. The men who were coming numbered less than the raiding Apache warriors, but those thirty white renegades knew all the Indian tricks, and also were more willing to risk their lives if necessary in an open attack. Also they could afford to take more time for a battle than the Apaches, since in the guise of ranchers they could travel south with their stolen horse herd with little chance of being stopped by troops.

"First thing Eb'll do," Bravo told Grosvenor, "is to stampede his big herd of horses against your corral as cover for his men to get close. I led a bunch of rangers in playing the same trick one night on some Mexicans holed up in a 'dobe house just below the Rio. Eb was along with me and he'll remember that dodge and likely use it. With the horses as cover and the dust they kick up, they'll come in and open the gate."

"Horses or no horses, they'll have a hard time reaching the gate," said Wall Grosvenor. "Our rifles will be covering that from the house."

"Then they'll get up close enough to blow a hole in the back of your 'dobe corral," Bravo stated. "Staghorn took along some blasting powder to use on Lanham's and your corral if he found it was needed. You will have to keep them from driving those stolen horses against your corral wall. I'd say you ought to spread that little stack of hay out in a line in front of the corral and fire it if they stampede those horses at you."

Wall Grosvenor nodded approval of that. "You ought to know what renegades will do," he said with unconscious irony. "You've fought enough of them to outguess them. You're the general here, Bravo, and we couldn't have a better man for the job."

Bravo jabbed a finger at a rocky little hillock, east of the big corral. "Ought to have a few rifles on top of there," he stated. "Then all the sides of the corral will be covered."

Hugh could see the sense of that. Rifles from the fortress-like house and the stony little hill would command all approaches to the diamond-shaped corral.

"But we can't split up," objected Grosvenor. "We've got too few as it is. That hill would be hard to hold. I'd rather lose my horses than have anyone risk his life out there."

Bravo let the matter drop and helped himself to two rifles from Grosvenor's well-stocked armory. He was already wearing his own six-shooter and the one captured from Red Cartry. Filling two additional cartridge belts, he buckled them about his waist, and went out to oversee the placing of the hay which was being carried to make a long line below the corral. They had little time for preparation. Out in the Animas already lighted by moon and stars hundreds of hoofs were beating a hard staccato on the valley floor.

Nearer and nearer came the drumming until the thud of hoofs became a rolling rumble. To Hugh Bryce those horses sounded more like the barbarian sweep of a horde of Plains Indians. When he heard the wild yells of the riders, for a moment Hugh doubted strongly that the charging men were whites. His father must be wrong; these were the Apache raiders who had twisted back through a cordon of troops. Then as the yells came closer, he identified them as the battle yells of white renegades.

Thudding up through the dusk, the riders and the herd they drove were all but hidden by a blinding cloud of dust churned up from the grass roots. There were several hundred horses in the column, looted from the Lanham, Logan and Cryder ranches.

Four renegades rode in the lead with other riders strung out along the flanks, pointing the horses into a spearhead directly toward the corral. Guns began to explode to add to the yells and the tumult made the horses suddenly into a panic-stricken stampeding mass.

BRAVO BRYCE shouted orders to waiting men along the line of hay and quickly little flames mushroomed. The flames joined, blazing as savagely as if the hay were pitch pine. Facing this flaming barricade the horses turned, breaking past riders who tried desperately to keep them headed for the corral. Unable to hold the column, the renegades had to let the horses scatter back into the valley, where by dint of hard riding, Staghorn's men bunched them loosely against the foot of the ridge.

Meanwhile the men who had fired the hay after throwing a few shots into the blinding dust cloud, returned safely to the fortress-like house.

"Bet they won't try that again," said Bravo, chuckling. "But Eb will be hard to stop. I still say a man or two is needed out on that hill. One will be enough. They'll make the main attack on the house. I'll go out," he added carelessly. And before they had time to protest, he vanished through a doorway, carrying a rifle in each hand.

"Wait, Bravo!" Grosvenor called after the man, but no reply came. The rancher swore heatedly. "It'll be suicide out there. Go bring your father back, Hugh."

Hugh nodded, but before he went out, he snatched up a filled canteen of water and dumped a little food in a sack with a few boxes of cartridges. He knew he would never persuade Bravo Bryce to go back.

Shots began hailing on the house and it was not until later that the Grosvenors noticed that neither of the Bryces had returned. By then the renegades had come too close for a messenger to hope to reach the hill.

Hugh had been under fire climbing the hill to join his father. He ran the last few yards to fling himself full length in a little depression, where Bravo Bryce lay busily piling up loose stones to make a rough barricade.

"What do you want here?" Bravo demanded harshly. "Go back, boy."

Hugh shook his head. "No, I'm staying. I want to be with you."

Bravo hesitated, but as shots whistled over their heads, he realized the impossibility of return.

"You'll have to stay now," he conceded. "But you shouldn't have come. Keep low," he ordered sharply. "Those fellows can shoot."

Bravo brought out a knife and began to dig, making a little trench big enough to hold the two, while Hugh piled up more stones. Then Bravo edged a rifle barrel between two rocks of the barricade. In the moonlight half a dozen men could be seen running afoot toward the north corner of the diamond corral, out of reach as Bravo had foreseen of the guns from the house.

Bravo fired rapidly and as two of the men

went down, the others turned back. Bravo was counted one of the finest rifle shots in the West, and Hugh could well believe it. Those had been incredibly long shots considering the dusty moonlight. Enraged by the loss of the two men, the renegades turned at once on the pair on the hill, Eb Staghorn sending a good half of his force crawling Apache-style up the slopes, using cover of available bushes and boulders.

The rifles at the fort-like house meanwhile hotly engaged the remainder of the attackers. Hugh was worried about Ann Grosvenor but those adobe walls were thick and there were enough rifles inside to hold the building. Then he was too busy to think, as dozens of bullets spatted each minute against the stones piled about them or whistled overhead. He and his father emptied their rifles carefully in return.

Finding the pair a tough nut to crack, a lull came in the firing, Staghorn calling off his men to brew stronger war medicine. Bravo tried to scratch the trench a little deeper but had to give up when he struck rocks too big to dislodge.

The moon shadows lengthened to mark the hours. Dust particles churned up by the horses still floated in the air, turned by the moon into a silver haze.

"Son, you lay low and let me handle this," Bravo ordered. "All your life is ahead of you; most of mine is water under the bridge. I can't have anything happen to you, Hughie. But I'm glad we're here together. I've something to talk over with you. I've made a mighty poor showing as a father. Your mother was my balance wheel, and I hit the toboggan after we lost her. I made a lot of big mistakes in my life, but my biggest was sending my son away to Arizona and not coming here to live with him. We could have been partners on a ranch together."

"We can still be partners if you say the word," said Hugh huskily.

"Too late for that. As I said, I haven't been a good father, Hughie, but I always figured to make a big stake some day so's to leave you a big outfit as inheritance. It didn't pan out that way for me back in Texas, and I took that job with the express company. With the idea, son, of learning of money shipments. Staghorn had wrote me; and said he'd have men to help us on a hold-up over here. It was the one time I turned outlaw—after a life spent huntin' down the breed.

"But something happened, the luck that some Apaches came along to steal our horses before the train we planned to hold up pulled in. I'm telling you this, because Ann says you've been thinking that your dad was a big man, maybe so big it made you feel small. Ann, she's a fine girl, son. She thinks a lot of you; she told me so. I was crazy, son, to run with the kind I'd hunted all my life."

"You can forget that. You turned against Eb."

"Yes, but it can't wipe out that hold-up I helped plan."

The attack picked up again, stopping their talk. Together they dropped shots into the advance, while the spatter and ugly whine of bullets sounded all about them. The shots came from closer and closer range as Staghorn's renegades crept nearer.

His father, Hugh realized suddenly, was firing only an occasional shot, as if he were tiring.

"You all right, Dad?" he asked.

"All right, son," Bravo Bryce muttered. "We're holding 'em, I wish—Hugh, you make it back to the house. I can handle 'em alone."

Hugh said nothing to that. His father was a little out of his head. There was no possible chance of getting back to the house now, but of course he would not have gone anyway. "Just luck—I didn't turn outlaw," muttered Bravo as he reloaded a rifle with a painful slowness.

"More than luck," said Hugh. "I drove away those horses you had near Ransom Station. I'd learned of the hold-up you and Eb planned."

"So it was you!" exclaimed Bravo. Then he chuckled. "I wish Eb Staghorn could know that. And you knew I was in with them? That's why you ran off those horses—to keep your dad from turning renegade? I'm glad you were the one, Hughie. That's a debt a man don't mind owing his son."

The cursing of Staghorn's renegades came plainly to the pair. Eb was urging his men to make a rush that would silence the rifles on the hill. Valuable minutes were slipping away. The sound of the battle might bring help, even a troop of cavalry. The renegades refused to risk a rush, but they worked their

way a little closer. One of them had a buffalo gun which roared like a cannon, sending heavy slugs to tear into the flimsy barricade, smashing a hole in it. Bravo shoved Hugh back, poked his rifle through the hole and emptied his rifle. The buffalo gun fell silent. Hugh realized suddenly that Brave had worked his body as barricade in front of Hugh, closing the gap in the wall, but when he protested Bravo refused stubbornly to give up his place.

"I'm done for," said Bravo. "Been hit a time or two. Shoot over me, son; hold 'em back. They're getting ready for a rush to finish us. I got a shot or two left in me—"

Then Bravo Bryce suddenly raised his head a little and lifted a yell. "You, Eb," he called hoarsely. "Hear that? Help coming for Grosvenor. You done stayed too long."

Hugh pulled him down and got ready to meet the rush with two fully loaded rifles, two six-shooters. Then he too listened. He could hear the drum of hoofs out in the valley. Riders thundering to join in the battle.

As it afterward developed Major Lanham had got mounts for his cowboys by leading them afoot to corner a few horses in his mountain pasture. Riding bareback toward Grosvenor's, several men from the Logan ranch had joined them. They came charging in to the east of the corral, heading for the hill which the Bryces held. They rode recklessly making up their fewness of numbers by the ferocity of their attack.

Staghorn realized he had delayed too long and he and his men raced off the hill to head for their horses. Hugh got to his knees, shooting fast. There was little fight left in the renegades; their only idea was escape. Staghorn himself, just as he swung into his saddle, ran into the fire of a little group led by Lanham and was found later, wedged under his dead horse and as dead as the animal. Several others of the short men including Dake Salmon were found dead or badly hurt. The rest escaped to head out of Arizona Territory. This time they would stay permanently out of it.

Hugh picked up his father, bloody, unconscious, and carried him into the new house to lay him on a bed. There Wall Grosvenor who was somewhat of an amateur doctor made an examination. He shook his head. Too many bullets had hit Bravo Bryce in that defense of the hill, when he had made his body into a barricade for his son. Bravo's luck had run out at last.

The ex-ranger recovered consciousness as a slug of whiskey was poured down his throat. He lay quietly for a minute, perspiration beading his face, every breath a gasping fight for life. Then as the liquor took hold, he seemingly grew stronger.

"No good, Wall," he told Grosvenor when the rancher would have put on bandages to soak up the blood welling from the bullet punctures. "I know when I'm done fore. I'd like to be alone with Hugh."

Wall Grosvenor went out and Bravo Bryce lay, staring up at his son. And Hugh Bryce looking down at his father saw the Bravo Bryce of his boyhood, lying there dying as heroically as he had lived, fighting to the end a battle he could not hope to win.

Bravo's lips moved. "No weak strain in you, Hughie. I'm proud of you, my boy. I'm proud to have been on that hill with you —just you and me. It made up a little for the years we weren't together."

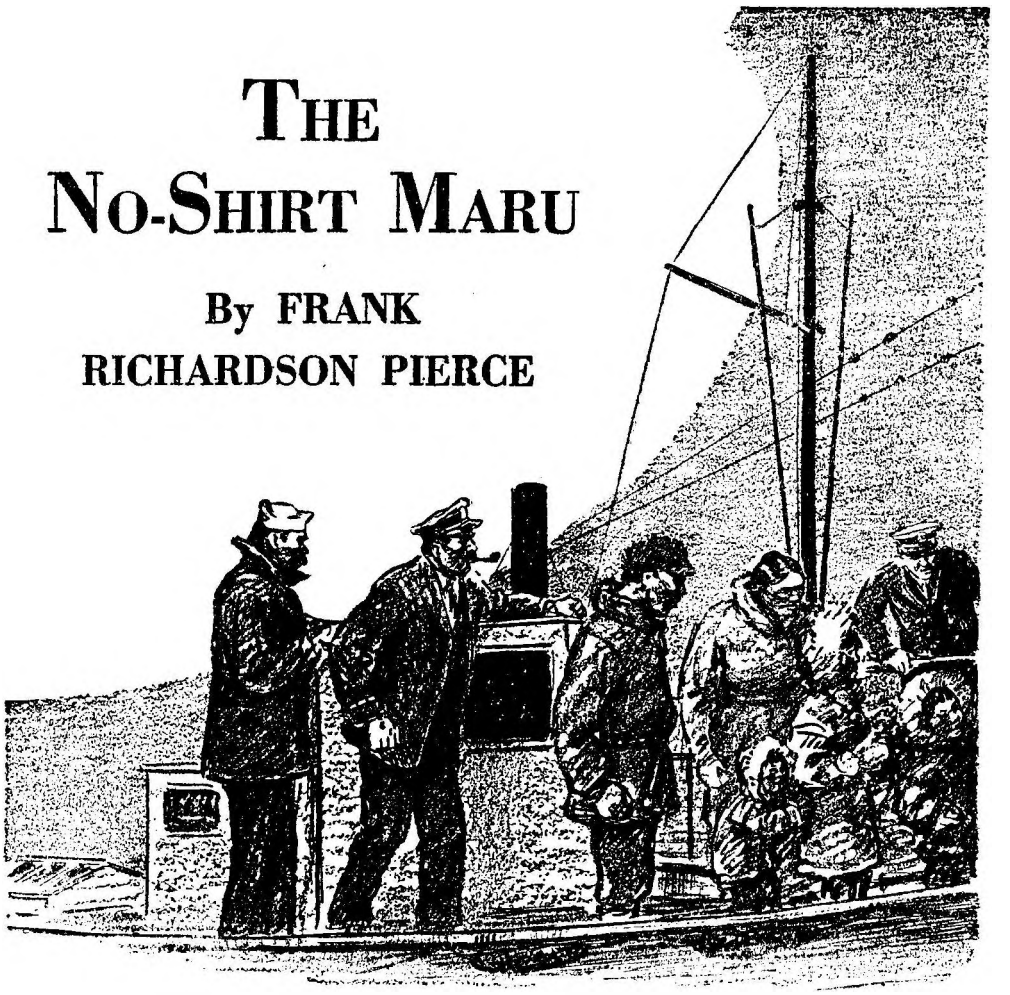
"You took bullets for me," said Hugh.

"Glad I could—do something—for you," Bravo mumbled, the strength suddenly flowing out of him. Then helped by Hugh he struggled to a sitting position to look out into the moonlit valley for a long moment. "Boys," Bravo called clearly, "there's a bunch of Comanches over the hill. Follow me. We'll scatter 'em same as a flock of buzzards."

He sagged slowly, head sinking to his chest. "A good night for a long ride, boys," Bravo Bryce muttered. "Let's start; we've a long ways to go."

THE NO-SHIRT MARU

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE



ME AND Bulldozer Craig are sitting in an Alaskan hotel watching a December blizzard blow and wondering if the Christmas mail would catch up with us, when a smart looking naval ensign bears down under full sail. "Mr. Michael J. McGee?" he asks.

"That's my maiden name," I answer.

"Are you also No-Shirt McGee?"

"Yeah, I'm a couple of guys," I answer.

"What can I do for you? Meet up with my pardner, Bulldozer Craig. And before you start wondering why a big bruiser like him isn't fighting the Japs I'll explain he's got an irregular heart and his blood pressure goes up. Also, that neither of us thinks it's important, but the doctors do."

"Then," he says, "I guess I've found my men. The admiral would like to see you at your convenience."

"At *our* convenience?" I snort. "We'll see the admiral—if he wants us—and *his* convenience. He's a busy man. We're just a couple of sourdoughs with time on our hands."

A gleam comes into his eyes, as if he's thinking, "The admiral will fix things so

Any War Would Be Simple if Run by Sourdoughs Like No-Shirt and Bulldozer

that you'll have no time on your hands, gentlemen." Then he says, "How about this evening, after dinner?"

"Okay," me and Bulldozer answer in unison. "And if the admiral takes on his chow, as he usually does, at this hotel, we'll set up the coffee and cigars in our room afterwards. Or if he wants us at headquarters, we'll be there with our ears pinned back."

The ensign disappears and shows up a half hour later with the news that the admiral accepts with pleasure. I dig up a bottle of brandy with the idear of spiking the admiral's coffee against the bitter cold raging without. We've got to keep our admirals in the pink as long as the Japs are on the loose.

He shows up after eight o'clock, and he's alone. "This," I tell Bulldozer, "is a social call. When he has navy business up his sleeve, a couple of staff officers usually come along."

In case you haven't heard, me and Bulldozer have been drug in a couple of times by the brass hats because we happen to have learned things about Alaska the hard way.

"I was in hopes he'd give us something to do," Bulldozer sadly observes. "Not since we helped 'em build a landin' field for

planes out on the Aleutians have I had any fun."

Bulldozer is still moaning when I answer the knock on the door. "Good evening, gentlemen," the admiral says. "The weather is a bit on the raw side tonight."

"Not pryin' into military secrets," Bulldozer says, "but have any of your listening posts picked up Santa Claus?"

"Santa is probably is some snug harbor riding out the storm, Mr. Craig," the admiral says. Bulldozer hands him the McGee brand of coffee, and he smacks his lips. "I've never tasted finer coffee," he says, reaching for a second cup.

"Plenty more where that come from," Bulldozer says.

"No-Shirt," the admiral says when we've all relaxed, "do you know anything about the salmon cannery business?"

"Admiral," I say, "are you kidding me? Has some double-barreled so and so put you up to——"

"I assure you I'm serious," he interrupts.

"I didn't intend to blow up," I tell him. "But I know plenty about the salmon cannery business. I went broke in two seasons. You get your cannery ready for business, a big crew on hand drawing pay, then you wait for the blasted fish to show up. The first year was an off season. The second, the Japs started fishing with three-mile-long nets squarely in the spot where the salmon move on their way to the McGee fishing grounds. That busted me."

"I should imagine, No-Shirt," he says. Then you could destroy a cannery? You would know what vital parts to damage to put a cannery out of business for a season?"

"I sure know exactly that," I admit, "but money can't hire me to do it."

"Oh, I don't mean an American cannery," he says, "I have in mind a Japanese establishment—several in fact. Very large ones."

"That's different," I tell him. "You interest me strangely, Admiral." Then I look at Bulldozer. You'd think somebody had put a Christmas turkey in front of him. He's almost drooling.

"Lead us to it, Admiral," Bulldozer says. "Where is it?"

The admiral spreads out a small chart and puts his finger on a little dot. "There," he says, and waits for us to recover from the shock.

HELL! The cannery is in Japan. Well, not exactly in Japan but Sakhalin Island, which is half Jap and half Russian. To get there you have to sneak through straits which the Japs probably have mined.

"You're familiar with conditions there?" the admiral asks.

"I got mixed up in a placer deal years ago in Siberia," I answer. "Me and the Russians didn't see eye to eye on some angles, and I got chased out of the country. I went back to Sakhalin Island later on and helped the Russians build a cannery. The Japs put on some kind of squeeze play—which you can bet your bottom dollar the Russians haven't forgotten—and got some leases. Now they're canning salmon to beat hell. And if I know the Japs—and I think I do—they're saying to hell with conservation and are canning everything they can catch."

"Exactly, No-Shirt," the admiral says. "They will ruin the fisheries. Now the destruction of the key canneries will seriously impair their food supply."

"Darned tootin', the fish-eatin' monkeys," Bulldozer growls. "I'm game, if No-Shirt is."

"Listen, you big lug," I snort. "I lead, and you follow. Admiral if you're hinting around that you'd like somebody to volunteer to do this job, we're your hairpins."

"I'm confident you're the men for the job," the admiral says, "but I don't want you to go into this blindly. There's a very good chance that you won't come back."

"Of course Bulldozer is much younger," I answer, "but I've done everything and seen everything—except a Jap cannery going up in smoke. What if I do get knocked off? Small loss. And I won't know it. One minute I'll see the cannery burning, and the next St. Peter will be saying, "Michael J. (No-Shirt) McGee. Hmmm. Your record is bad. I'm afraid you took the wrong fork in the trail. I'm afraid I can't keep you up here with your friends."

"That won't bother No-Shirt," Bulldozer says. "He'd just tell his friends there's a big gold strike in Hell and they'll all follow him down."

"What is the deal?" I ask the admiral.

"Transportation will be arranged for you," he answers, "and somewhere in the Sea of Okhotsk you'll be put aboard a small

Japanese fishing boat. With this you will make your way into port and——"

"Yeah—go on," Bulldozer urges.

"You will have to rely on your own quick thinking and Yankee resourcefulness," the admiral explains. "It is hoped your rescue by our forces will be successful."

"Suppose the port is icebound?" Bulldozer suggests.

"Then you'll mush over the ice," the admiral explains. "We are counting on the long, dark nights, the brief gloomy days, the snow, fog and all that to make this venture a success."

"The trouble is," I tell him after some thought, "me and Bulldozer don't look much like Japs. I'll admit we'd never be seriously considered as candidates for Mr. Atlantic City, but still—we're a hell of a lot better looking than the monkey men."

"We've thought of that too. Do you know Ivan Savanoff? He's an Aleut."

SURE I knew Ivan. He pronounced his name I-van instead of the snooty Eee-von. And he sure does look like a Jap. That's true of a number of Aleuts. Long before the Russians settled on the islands, people came from the Orient in skin boats. "He's an educated man," I tell the admiral, "and has a wife and four-five kids."

"They were on Attu when the Japs moved in," the admiral says, "but Ivan was on a trading schooner, which was ordered turned back. They practically had to put the poor fellow in irons. He was bound to go to Attu even if he had to take over the schooner. He hasn't heard a word since. Now, he's out for revenge. And he not only speaks Russian like many of the Aleuts, but he can speak the Japanese language."

"Will he obey orders in a pinch?" I ask. "Or is he so full of revenge that he'll go hog wild the first time he sees a Jap?"

"He's the coldest blooded man I've ever met," the admiral answers. "And he'll obey orders. You can depend on that. He came to me with the idea of burning Jap canneries, and suggested that you run the show, No-Shirt."

"If that's the set-up, count me and Bulldozer in," I tell him. "When do we start?"

"Again let me remind you the odds are all against your returning. You will be made a warrant bosun, Craig will be a gunner's mate, first-class, and Savanoff a cox'n," the admiral says. "As men in the United States Naval Reserve you will be entitled to treatment as prisoners of war, if captured. But I doubt if you'll get such treatment. You will likely be shot as spies. Your warrant as chief bosun; and the ratings given Craig and Savanoff are temporary. You will be given honorable discharges as soon as you are returned to Alaska. Any questions?"

"The things we'd like to know you can't answer for reasons of security," I tell him, "so we'll just say include us in the deal. You'll find us here when you want us."

As the admiral started to leave, he said, "Of course, you'll put your affairs in order." His voice reminded me of the life insurance agent when he says, "This clause in the policy provides funds to cover expenses incurred in the *last* illness."

When the admiral had gone, Bulldozer says, "I think I'll have a drink of that coffee—without the coffee." Then he pours a stiff slug of brandy into the cup and downs it.

My knees are beginning to feel like rubber, so I have me some more of the same.

II

WELL you should see me in a warrant officer's uniform. There're crossed anchors of a bosun, and a broken stripe on each sleeve to indicate I rank with, but after ensigns. That means the youngsters can give me orders. Bulldozer looks tough enough to be a couple of gunner's mates, but it ends there. His salute is rusty, and mine's worse.

"Now why couldn't they have done this to me in the first place," Bulldozer growls, "instead of giving me a song and dance about high blood pressure and an irregular heart. I'm the same guy."

"They're expecting you to be killed," I answer, "and they figger your heart will stand up long enough for that. When it comes to a long haul, it's different. As it was they had to get waivers on both of us."

"How're they going to get us there?" Bulldozer asks. "In one of them big long-range seaplane jobs? Or, maybe we'll parachute our way to the ground. That'd be somethin'."

"Bulldozer, we'll be loaded with high explosives, and there'll be no parachuting with that stuff," I tell him. Still, it's something

to think about. The navy is scared to death of a leak, and ain't telling a thing.

We mark time for several days, then the weather clears and a car calls for us. We're driven out to an airport where there's a neat transport job all warmed up. "Get into those flying suits," a petty officer tells us. "Now in case you have to bail out, here's what you do——"

"Me and Bulldozer have been members of the Caterpillar Club for several years," I tell him. "A plane got in trouble over the Yukon country once and we had to hit the silk."

"No-Shirt prayed all the way down," Bulldozer says.

"You know doggoned well I didn't pray," I snort. "It just looked like it. My hands was that way because I was lighting my pipe."

A few minutes later we're taking off. After that it's clear sky, snow flurries, then we start climbing and get above the clouds. No, there aren't any beacons lighting the way, but the tips of the Aleutian Islands above the clouds work first rate.

We land at an advance base, and the country has sure changed since me and Bulldozer last saw that particular island—big landing field; fair-sized town, with streets and lights; repair shops and docks. But there isn't a woman in sight. The place is infested with army, navy and marines, though; and there're plenty of guns tucked away where we can't see 'em.

An officer and car is waiting for us. We come through with a snappy salute, get into the car and end up at a wharf. "Sufferin' Malemutes!" Bulldozer whispers, "It looks as if we're goin' by submarine." There's a queer expression on his face.

"You didn't think they was giving us the battle force?" I asked. "This is only a penny-ante job when you come right down to it."

"But a *submarine,*" Bulldozer mutters. "I never did like to get into a place I couldn't get out of."

"You'd better pipe down," I advise, "or they'll throw you out of this deal."

"Now a destroyer is faster," Bulldozer argues, "and before we knew it we'd be on the job."

"And a destroyer can be seen," I remind him.

Me and Bulldozer remember our book learning and salute the side and the officer of the deck, and I say in my best military manner, "No-Shirt—I mean, Bosun McGee reports himself aboard, sir."

Ivan is already aboard, and with him is another Jap-looking Aleut he calls Pete. A shipment of time bombs is going aboard, along with a knocked-down canvas boat and light sled. Ivan is all smiles. Back in his mind is the idea he can get some trace of his wife and children once he lands on Jap-held soil.

The skipper, Lieutenant-Commander Sherwin, is a pleasant cuss who looks as if he has a lot on the ball. "It looks to me like there's a lot of teamwork on this boat," Bulldozer says. "Everybody knows he can depend on the other guy."

A petty officer shows us where we're going to bunk, then we make a tour of the craft. Pretty soft in one respect—sun lamps, phonographs, coffee ready any hour of the day or night, and ice boxes with everything a man needs.

"I suppose you'll get your ears knocked down if you raid the ice box?" Bulldozer says. I can see the idear looks good to him.

"Help yourself, whenever you're hungry," the petty officer says.

"I suppose it's okay, but somehow, offering me and Bulldozer swell grub makes me think of the fine meal they give a condemned man before executing him. I tell myself, "This ain't going to last, No-Shirt. There'll be plenty of ice, but no ice box where you're going."

Me, Bulldozer and the skipper check over our outfit to make sure nothing has been left out, then the lines are cast off and the Diesels start turning over. We ease into thick weather—beyond the protection of a snug harbor and guns. From now on we have to take care of ourselves in storm and when surrounded by the enemy.

Day after day we cruise westerly, protected by the icy fog and snow. There's about one chance in a thousand that we'll have to make a crash dive, but they take no risks.

Early one morning a change comes over the crew. It was something in the air. Oh, they went about their duties as expertly as ever, and were just as cheerful. Wise cracks were up to par, but we could feel the change.

"Sneaking through mine fields off the

Kuriles?" I asked Sherwin. He'd let me come into the conning tower. The bow was slicing through icy seas, and snow flurries blew about like loose curtains.

"Yes," he answered. "In the straits, dead ahead. The sound gear has picked up a patrol craft. If they're on their toes, they may have picked us up."

A moment later horns sound, bells ring, and I break my neck getting below. The Diesels stop their clanking and motors begin to hum. Sherwin tells me to watch a gauge and report it's readings. I'm wise. He wants me to keep my thoughts and imagination off of mines.

I LOOK at Bulldozer. The big lug is breaking out in a cold sweat. I can't see Ivan and Pete. They're up forward. Something bangs along the hull and I can see the whites of Bulldozer's eyes. His lips say "Mine!"

Sherwin says, "Glass float. They use 'em on fish nets."

We've seen them. They range in size from three inches to better than a foot in diameter. They come ashore as far south as northern California, along with other stuff carried by the Japan current.

There's quite a banging, because we've evidently fouled a fish net and are taking it along with us. There could be mines mixed up in the deal. Or perhaps it will bring a patrol boat. We go deeper, but at very slow speed in case we hit a submerged reef.

Something's coming. It sounds like a railroad train when you're under a bridge. "Jap destroyer," Sherwin says. He seems to be waiting for something.

He is! A depth bomb lets go, and I can feel my teeth jarring lose. "You learn to take it on a submarine," I tell Bulldozer, "as well as dish it out."

An invisible fist hits me and the lights go out.

That last one was close. I sniff for the smell of busted batteries, and listen for the trickle of water, like they do in motion pictures.

The lights go on again. "So you're the man who has seen everything and done everything?" Bulldozer taunts. Then he gives me the Bronx cheer. "You're scared green."

"It's the lights that give me the green complexion," I answer. "Captain how long does this usually last."

"Sometimes it goes on for hours," he answers. "It breaks the monotony of the voyage, don't you think?"

"It sure keeps you out of a rut," I agree. "And you earn that swell grub in the ice box. That last one was quite a ways off. Man what a relief!"

"They're bracketing us," Sherwin says. "Any time now—" Out go the lights again and the whole boat shudders. There's some fooling around before the lights go on again.

"Wipe that smile off'n your face, Bulldozer," I growl.

"If you could see the look on your face, No-Shirt, when the lights go on." He's grinning.

"Don't forget we've got to come back this way—if we come back," I remind him. And that wipes the grin off'n his face.

It lasts better than an hour, and by that time there's enough rubber in my knees to make a set of tires. My shirt is wringing wet and I haven't been out in any rain, either.

When the detection gear tells us all is quiet, we surface. The skipper says we're through the straits, and thanks to a snow flurry there won't be any planes to bother us. But we're kept below.

Days later Sherwin calls me to the periscope. "How do you like the looks of that craft?" he asks.

I'm expecting to see no less than a Jap battleship. Instead a fishing boat is drifting along. There's ice in the distance—broken up floes.

We call Ivan. He takes a look, then Pete looks a long time. "Good boat," Pete says.

"Pete knows. He's fished," Ivan explains.

"I'll shop around if you like," Sherwin offers. "There are others not far away. We believe in satisfying the customer."

"That's the one," Pete says. "Good boat in ice or rough weather..

WE MOVE into a squall and surface. The idea is to get the jump on the Japs and not have to shoot up the boat. We come roaring out of the squall at twenty knots, with men at the deck guns and the machine guns and AA stuff.

A machine gun chatters, stitching a line of water jets toward the Jap. Four men

come out, take one look on the on-coming submarine and decide they're going to be cut in half. The damned fools go overboard.

"I thought it would work out that way," Sherwin says. He orders full speed astern, and a few moments later we swing alongside the fisherman. Ivan and Pete jump to her deck. The former takes the wheel, the latter drops into the engine room..

The two craft stop and the submarine crew, working fast, sends our gear aboard. "Some good American grub is included," Sherwin says, "but don't leave tin cans bobbing around for the Japs to find. Sink 'em." He shakes hands all around and wishes us luck. "We'll pick you up if we can." He gave a position ten miles at sea. "There'll be some kind of a stove aboard. Toss some of this into the fire. It'll send a red glow out of your smoke pipe—something like the colored fire we used to have on the Fourth of July. We'll know it is you." He handed me a package.

At that moment an ensign reported, "Heavy craft approaching at high speed, sir."

"S'long." Sherwin shouted. While me and Bulldozer boarded the fishing boat, the submarine crew was stowing the guns and going below. Even as we stood on deck, she slipped under the surface leaving water boiling in angry masses.

Then it was Ivan handed me and Bulldozer grenades. "You're commander, No-Shirt," he says, "but if at anytime it looks as if we'd be captured, I think we should pull the pin and throw the grenade into the time bombs. That's better than capture." Then to my astonishment he gives me a wink.

"A hell of a lot better than capture by the Japs," I agree. "You understand, don't you Bulldozer?" He didn't get the wink.

Bulldozer's throat is suddenly dry. "If that's the way you boys want to play," he manages to say, "it's okay by me."

Later, when I got Ivan alone I ask, "What was the idear of that wink?"

"Did I wink?" he asks.

Before I can make any comment, a mass of metal and black smoke breaks from the thick weather. It's a Jap cruiser. "Look what's comin'!" Bulldozer yells. "And us with seats on the fifty-yard line. Look at it come!"

A torpedo is streaking through the water, and if it hits that cruiser, she'll probably roll over on us. Her bow slices by, throwing a wave toward us, and seconds later the torpedo cuts across where her stern had just been.

"I don't think they even saw it," Bulldozer says. "I'll bet Sherwin's burned up about now. He hates to waste a fish." Then we grab a hold and hang on as the wave tosses us about.

One thing is certain. The Japs aren't expecting American submarines in these waters or they wouldn't turn unescorted cruisers loose.

We stow our gear, check on the fuel, and get under way. "What's the name of this boat, Ivan?" Bulldozer asks. "Some kind of a *Maru* I'll bet."

It was a Maru, but the front name is so complicated, that Bulldozer shakes his head and says, "Come again, Ivan." Ivan repeats the name and Bulldozer says, "That's out." He goes forward, pulls out his flask and lets a couple of drops fall on the bow. "I christen thee, the *No-Shirt Maru,*" he says.

III

IVAN joins me and Bulldozer in the wheelhouse after we've been under way an hour. "Bulldozer," he says, "you go below and talk to Pete. Me? I talk to No-Shirt. That Pete, I don't want to listen."

"Okay," Bulldozer says, "but make it snappy. These Jap boats don't smell so good below decks, and I was raised as a pet."

"You might as well get used to it," I tell him, "because me and you're going to put in plenty of time below decks when other boats are around. Only one face can be seen from that wheelhouse."

"And that's my Jap-lookin' face," Ivan says. "I hate it, but it comes in handy."

When Bulldozer was gone, Ivan says, "No-Shirt. That ain't Pete. I didn't know the real Pete very well. I think this fellow murder him."

"Yeah? What makes you think that?"

"This fellow, officer in Imperial Japanese Navy. I sure him around the Aleutian Islands before the war, on fishing boat taking soundings. Couple of times I see young Jap officers bow low to him and hiss. I think he spy, going home to report. Some

way he learn what we are up to so he join."

"I see," he killed Pete and took his place. He's planning to kill two birds with one stone—get back to Japan and block our little bombing deal."

"That's it!"

"Then let's settle his kettle of fish right now," I suggest.

"No," Ivan answers, "you *think* you can find way into port. I *think* I can find way into port. Him *know* he can find way. Him figger to turn us over to Japs. Him know all about submarine coming to pick us up. Him fix it so plenty Jap destroyers be waiting for Sherwin when he comes back. Better way, let him think him fool us. Pretty soon, we fool him. I take care of that," he adds quietly. "That's why I say we carry grenades around. If him make bad move we blow up everything. We can't let him get Sherwin."

"You've got something there, Ivan," I agreed. "You go below and talk to him. I'll pass the word along to Bulldozer when he shows up."

That evening I drop in on Pete. I put on my naivest expression. That's French for sucker. "Ivan tells me you two talked a lot on the voyage," I begin, "and he's got the idea you know these waters better than he does."

"Winters I went to school with the other Aleut children," Pete answers smoothly, "but summers I worked on fishing and trading schooners. I've been here many times, I could bomb out those Jap canneries with my eyes shut."

"We'll give you a chance," I told him. I'm watching him closely at the time, but his face is expressionless. "Ivan looks more like a Jap than you do," I continue. I get the feeling that that burns him up, but he don't show it. These high-class Japs are cool customers. "I think it'll be safer if we let Ivan be seen in the wheelhouse. You can lay out the courses, and he'll follow them. You seem to be good with engines, too."

"I have been around them since I was a small boy," he says.

I thought he might try to argue the point and insist on taking the wheel, but he doesn't. I've a hunch he thinks he's putting it over and to argue might arouse suspicion. I want him below for two reasons. First, he can't signal some passing fisherman. And secondly, if Ivan runs over the courses Pete lays out, then he can reverse them and get back to where the sub will be waiting for us.

Me and Bulldozer go over everything when Ivan joins Pete in the engine room again. "If Pete ain't Pete," he says, "are you sure Ivan's Ivan?"

"I'm sure of that," I answer. "Though he has changed in late years. Suppose we put it this way, Bulldozer, me and you are sure of each other. If one of us is always awake, we're always on guard."

"I figger Pete will be a good dog any way. He knows we'll toss grenades if capture is likely," he says. "He's prob'ly takin' important information back to Japan. To get it through he might be willing to let us bomb the canneries."

"I wouldn't go that strong," I answer. This group of canneries feed quite a hunk of the Jap army."

The courses that Pete lays out require a lot of zig-zagging back and forth and I can see that Ivan is getting nervous. There are ice masses piled up where the tides have stranded floes, which mean sand bars and reefs are close to the surface. When I come into the wheelhouse an hour before dark the second afternoon, Pete puts his finger on the chart. "Here's where we're supposed to meet the submarine. I'd like it better if it was closer. I figure it will be a seven-hours' run. Long ways if mad Japs are chasing you."

"The submarine is more important than we are, particularly at a time like this," I answer. "That looks like our port ahead." I'm crouched low so no one will see may American face. On either side there are fishing boats going in for fuel. As a guess I'd say fishing had been poor. None of 'em ride very low. The fact they're going out in this kind of weather proves that the Japs need fish plenty bad.

"That's our port," Ivan says. "No-Shirt, will you take the wheel?"

"Sure," I answer.

Bulldozer is taking a well-earned nap, and things are quiet except for the motor and the clank of machinery. In about ten minutes Ivan shows up. He's breathing hard and his hands are shaking. "How about a drink?" he asks.

"What happened?" I ask. "You look like you need it." I hand him the flask. He takes

a couple of stiff slugs and gives the flask back.

"You are the captain of the *No-Shirt Maru,*" he says, "and I should ask before I do anything. But—I thought it good to do something without asking. This I have done. Shall I take the wheel now?"

"You might as well," I answer. "I'm tired of steering, crouched down."

"Perhaps Captain No-Shirt will look after the engine while we go into port," he suggests. "Pete, who never was Pete is no longer standing the engine watch, sir."

"Where is he?"

"I took care of him, sir, before he took care of all of us," he gravely replied. He held up one finger. "That's one Jap who has paid for what the Japs may be doing to my family. I shall continue squaring the account."

The man's cold calmness sends chills up and down my backbone. I'd sure hate to have him on my trail. "Is Pete still aboard?" I ask.

"Oh, no," he answers. "A canvas, short piece of rope and several links of anchor chain took care of everything. I took his papers before I—left him."

He handed me a packet of papers and I went down to the engine room. Now I can't read the Jap lingo, though I can understand some of it. But those papers look like dynamite to me.

They're sketches of the installations we have made in the Aleutians, along with plenty of notes. I decide that it's risky business having them, but just the same my superior officers, admirals and such, might like to look 'em over. I'm just about to hide 'em, when I have another idear. Suppose we're caught? Then the Japs will have 'em anyway.

I call Bulldozer and discuss the matter with him. "Tell you what," he says. "We'll make 'em into a neat pack, and put a grenade inside. If things look bad, whoever is nearest the pack, pulls the pin, No-Shirt, things are gettin' complicateder, and complicateder, ain't they?"

There's a deadlight not much bigger than a silver dollar in the engine room. We take turns looking out, and as we round a headland Bulldozer yells, "Look, a cruiser and a tanker alongside her. There's another tanker tied up to a wharf. Man! Man! What I could do with a match! It's enough to make a man's mouth water."

"Keep your shirt on," I advise him. "This is a tougher spot than I ever figgered it would be. This has been developed into a small base. A refueling station, I'd say." I yell up at Ivan. "What do you think of the deal?"

"A man could raise plenty hell here . . . if they didn't catch him before he got started," Ivan answers. "I'm heading for the fish wharf. You'd better hide."

As he could operate the motor from the wheelhouse, me and Bulldozer squeeze into a compartment in the bow. There's another deadlight there, along with dampness, foul air and fish smells. He takes the port one and I take the starboard. That way we get a fair idear of what's going on.

The routine seems to be to tie up to the wharf and wait for the boat ahead to unload. Then you go over to the oil dock and take on fuel. Several boats are tied up at the cannery wharf. Nobody seemed to be aboard. "Crews gone ashore for a snort of saki," Bulldozer says.

A Jap woman takes our lines and makes fast, and I hear Ivan jabberin' with 'em. He's wearing oilskins we found aboard and he looks more like a Jap than a Jap does. After awhile he comes below and says, "I'm steppin' out with one of those lady longshoremen. I hope to find out something. I'll be back around midnight." Before I can think it over, or order him to stay aboard, he's gone.

"A hell of a note!" Bulldozer growls. "And we're locked in here and he's got the key."

WE TRY to make ourselves comfortable. The suspense is something terrible. The boat ahead unloads, and Japs come aboard the *No-Shirt Maru* and warp her up the wharf. From the sounds we get the idear that the women are unloading us.

There's plenty of hammering and thudding because the fish the Japs caught before we took over the boat were froze solid. They have to be broken loose. The bay itself is covered with blocks of floating ice. Young ice keeps forming and breaking up with the movement of the tide.

We huddle close together for warmth and cuss Ivan. Night comes and lights go on.

Them Japs aren't afraid of our planes, because there's no sign of a blackout. "Look at that oil tanker," Bulldozer says, "there must be something I can do to that baby."

I help him think, because it takes our minds off'n the cold, but nothing comes of it. Around midnight Ivan shows up. We can see him in the gloom and he's got his arm around that female longshoreman's shoulders and they're singing a Jap song. You know—all discords. Enough to drive a man nuts.

"Lit to the gills," Bulldozer says.

She wants to come aboard, but he talks her out of it, and comes down the ladder and staggers around. She zig-zags back and forth and disappears into the warehouse. "He sure got her ginned up," Bulldozer says.

A minute later he's at the door. "You boys okay?" he asks, and I realize he's cold sober.

"Except that we're chilled to the bone and our legs have gone to sleep," I answer, "We're fine and dandy."

He lets us out and gets something to eat —Jap grub, with hot tea. We don't dare eat American plan, as Bulldozer says, here.

"There're civilian prisoners here," Ivan says, "but I don't know whether my family is among them. These Japs aren't expecting a thing. They think they own the Aleutians all the way to Dutch Harbor and that the Americans are getting out of the Hawaiian Islands as fast as they can. I took that girl to several places and we weren't questioned. We passed sentries unchallenged. They just don't think attack of any kind is possible."

"That's logical enough," I answer. "They have no mixed population here. Naturally they figger everybody's loyal. And they'd never dream we'd come in this way. That's why we're getting away with it—so far. What's the plan?"

"We'll tie up at the cannery wharf," he says, "and lay over tomorrow. That's common enough after a hard trip. If we don't show up they'll figger we're asleep, or off somewhere, drunk. That'll give us daylight to size up everything. The snow's packed down, so it isn't easy to get off the trails once you've worked them out."

I can't eat the Jap grub, so swill down tea, help get the boat over to the cannery wharf, then turn in. Ivan locked the door leading to the bunks and sleeps outside the door just in case something happens.

Me and Bulldozer spend another day below decks, seeing what comes within range of the deadlights. Ivan is prowling around ashore. "I saw my wife," he says, "and she saw me, but we didn't speak. I just wandered up to the compound where prisoners were exercising and looked in. Others were doing it."

"Have you got the lay of the land figured out?" I ask. "I know how you feel about your family, but we're in the navy and we're here to do a job."

I expected him to argue, but he didn't. "We do the job tonight, sir," he says. 'I've noticed some of these northern Japs are as big as Bulldozer. You two men won't attract attention—if you cover up your uniforms."

Bulldozer looks at the oil dock a long time. One of the tankers has tied up and is discharging fuel into pipes running along the wharf and to tanks ashore. "What's the matter of fueling up while we have the chance?" he says. "We'll feel better with full tanks when we get ready to make a run for it. The getting away is going to be the hard part of this."

"We'll fuel up," Ivan agrees.

We chug slowly over to the wharf, tie up and Ivan goes ashore. This is another period of suspense. That damned tanker has gun crews aboard and they're loafing around for'd and aft. We hang around about an hour before a hose is sent aboard and we hear fuel gurgling into the tanks.

Bulldozer is restless as hell. "So near yet so far," he growls, scowling at the tanker. We can see her port side between the piling. The tide's going out and naturally our fish boat, being small, is way below the wharf planking. The air don't smell so good—a mixture of exposed marine life that grows on piling, plus oil odors.

It starts snowing, and Bulldozer says, "I'm goin' on deck for some air."

"You darned fool," I yell. "You'll be seen." I forget that I'm his superior officer and can order him about. To me he's just a young pardner who can't stand much more confinement.

"I notice them Japs tie wool rags around their faces to keep out the cold. Well, with these old fishermen's coats I can get by," he says.

I stay where I belong and he goes on deck.

Ivan is in the wharf office signing some kind of Jap paper to show that he's bought oil. The wind is driving the snowflakes hard now and everybody seems to have taken to cover except some Japs who are working on the next wharf. The snow soon blots them out.

In about a half hour Bulldozer is back. His hands are all over fuel oil, and he's cut 'em in a couple of places. He's puffing like a sawmill engine and his cheeks are redder'n a spanked baby's stern. "Quite a zip to the air," he says.

"What the hell have you been up to?" I ask.

"It's a long story," he says. "I don't think I'd better tell you now." We might be interrupted. Any way, here comes Ivan."

Ivan comes down the ladder, yells at a girl, who pulls it up, then says, "We'll shove off."

"Where to?" I ask.

"Cannery wharf again," he says.

There must be a dozen boats tied up there when we arrive. It's still snowing, which is tough because the trails we had all figgered out are filling in. Five minutes after we've tied up Ivan says, "Let's have one of those time bombs, sir."

WITH hatches down and doors locked, I break out the bombs. Ivan draws a plan, showing the different canneries. "This is one of the small ones," he says, "two miles up the bay. Call it A. Next are B, C, D. Then E. That's the one we're tied up to. We'll get F on our way out. A and E can take light bombs. B, C, and D, heavy ones. E will need two of the heaviest we've got."

"And you want to leave at bomb at A now?" I suggest.

"That's right," he answers. "What time had we better set it to go off."

"Three o'clock," Bulldozer says.

"Why three o'clock?" I ask.

"Because, as the poet says, that's the witchin' hour of the night," he answers.

"The poet never said any such thing," I tell him. "But if it's important to you three o'clock is okay with me. How about it, Ivan, can we plant these eggs and be down the bay by three o'clock?"

"Yes. Nights are long and we can start early," he says. Then he makes up a bundle, such as fishermen pack off'n their boats and goes ashore. The bomb's inside.

Me and Bulldozer are sure hungry for American grub by the time Ivan comes back from cannery A. But smells carry through a storm and somebody might wonder who was frying ham and eggs that time of night. "Better to eat fish another meal or two," Bulldozer advises, "than to eat it for the duration in some Jap prison camp."

So it's fish, rice cakes, rice and tea for us.

At eight o'clock me and Ivan decide to put a couple of big bombs into E, just in case we're caught working on the other jobs. We want to be sure and get E.

With our bombs well wrapped we walk down the wharf to a door in the back of the building. Here's the boilers and engine, with several electric generators. In summer a fair-sized stream gushes out of the hills back of the cannery, and water is piped to the building. Now the water mains are empty, to keep them from freezing and bursting. That's just fine. They won't help the fire none.

Ivan pushes open the door and we step inside. I've got a pencil flashlight and it shows us the set-up without giving enough light to be noticed outside. The windows are pretty well frosted any way. The floor is oil-soaked like most canneries, and the rafters are high enough so there'll be plenty of air inside once things start burning. We place one bomb between the engine and generators, then move along to the automatic machinery that cuts the salmon, puts the right amount in each can, puts a top on it and seals it.

"It's good American machinery," I whisper.

"Yes," Ivan says. "But it got into bad company. A bomb here should drop the interior walls in on top of the blaze. The walls are greasy, too."

He places the bomb, starts it going, and follows me out of the place. I can see that the blowing snow has almost covered our tracks already.

When we get back aboard the boat Bulldozer is all steamed up. "A Jap navy officer was here. He yelled and kicked on things, but I laid low. I didn't want to bump him off because there might be others around. He beat it, and it wouldn't surprise me if he came back with a squad."

"You stay here and bluff your way out, Ivan," I tell him, "while me and Bulldozer

spread our eggs through the other plants. We'll get into them if we have to jimmy the doors."

"I've already tampered with the locks," Ivan says. "They'll open with a little patience. If the boat isn't here when you come back, I'll be off F with her. If I'm not there, then the Japs have taken over." He shrugged his shoulder. "Your only chance, then, will be to try and take another boat and escape."

"We'd better sink that knock-down boat and sled," I said. "We didn't need it coming in over the ice floes, and it's a cinch it won't help us to get out of here. If it's found aboard, we'll be shot."

"I'll watch," Ivan promised. "You sink it." He climbed the ladder and disappeared up the wharf while me and Bulldozer hooked a small boat anchor onto the stuff and dropped it over the side. Ivan came back on the run. "Japs coming," he said. "Quick, the bombs."

We carried them to the wharf and cached them behind the building, then waited. Three Japs stamped down the wharf and went aboard the *No-Shirt Maru*. "I'll try to bluff it through," Ivan whispers, "while you boys lay your eggs."

He followed the Japs aboard and Bulldozer says, "Nice guy, I wonder if we'll ever see him again."

"You mean you wonder if he'll ever see us again," I answer. We make a trip to the two nearest canneries and when we come back the *No-Shirt Maru* is gone, but the remaining bombs are there.

"It's damned near midnight," Bulldozer says. "How far is it to cannery F?"

"Far enough so that we'll be bow-legged from the weight of the bomb," I answer.

"Let's hurry," he says. "I sure hope the *No-Shirt Maru* is there when we show up. If she isn't, we'll have to work fast, because all hell is going to break loose at three o'clock."

"Don't I know it," I answer.

"Brother, you don't know the half of it," Bulldozer says—which is no way for a man to talk to his superior officer.

It's an hour's hard mushing to that cannery and toward the end even Bulldozer gets tired of breaking trail. The place is deserted, and it's one place where Ivan hasn't fooled with the lock. We kick the door in, plant the bomb, drag the door shut and go out to the end of the wharf. "I can't hear a thing," Bulldozer says after listening for several minutes. "What'd we better do?"

"If he does show up, we'd better be here," I tell him. "Let's scout around a little and spot a boat we might use in a pinch."

WE STAY together, cutting in half our chances of locating something for the getaway, but we double our chances of surviving if we run into trouble. We return at two-thirty and things are quiet. "I hope that time bomb don't go off ahead of time," Bulldozer mutters.

"Pipe down," I whisper, "something's coming." I can hear the crunch of young ice against a hull, and the sound of an oar.

"It's the *No-Shirt Maru*," Bulldozer whispers. "Engine's quit, I guess. He's using a trap for a sail. A hell of a chance we have for a getaway now."

"Take a line," Ivan calls to us.

"Line, hell," Bulldozer says. "Let's get out of here."

The boat bumps the wharf and Ivan jumps ashore, rope in hand. "I was arrested," he says, hurried, "Jap officers. It took me some time to—dispose of them. I sailed the boat so patrols wouldn't hear the exhaust sounds of the motor."

"Swell," Bulldozer exclaims, "but time bombs are going to let go soon and——"

"My family is escaping," Ivan answers. "We must help them. They have instructions to make their way here—if they escaped."

"My sainted aunt!" I yelp. "They're escaping—if they escaped."

"We've done what we were ordered to do," Ivan says, "why shouldn't I help my people?"

"You've got something there," I admit, "but what about getting those papers we found on Pete to our superior officers?"

"Come!" he says nervously.

He starts running and me and Bulldozer follow. Inside of five minutes we spot a couple of women coming through the snow. Each is carrying a child. More kids trail behind the trail-breakers, and in some cases kids are carrying kids.

"How many wives has Ivan got?" Bulldozer asks. "And who is he, the All-American father?"

Ivan grabs the nearest youngster, yells,

"Help yourself," at me, and starts running back to the *No-Shirt Maru*. I pick up a kid, Bulldozer grabs two, and the women catch the weaker boys and girls by their arms and yank 'em along.

Ivan is waiting when we arrive. We toss kids down like sacks of flour and he catches 'em.

We help the women down then jump to the deck. "It's eleven minutes to three," Bulldozer says. "Oh lord, I hope the engine starts."

It does!

We cut along the waterfront with me at the wheel. Five minutes later the tanker looms up at the oil wharf, and Bulldozer grabs the wheel and sends the *No-Shirt Maru* toward the middle of the bay. It's quit snowing and I figger we'll be safer near the wharves. "What's the idear of getting out where we can be seen?" I ask.

"You'll find out," he answers.

I keep looking at my wrist watch and at three o'clock I've never been in a quieter place. A couple of seconds later I hear a blast. Not a big one, but a sort of grunt. A few seconds later a blaze shoots up from a big cannery. Suddenly there are other blasts and other blazes. All over the bay you can hear alarms sounding as gun crews are called into action. The Japs figger an air raid is on, I guess. Then all hell breaks loose.

Something jars the *No-Shirt Maru* and starts the kids to bawling.

Sheets of flame are coming from the tanker, and burning oil thrown on adjoining buildings are starting fires. "Hells bells!" I yell. "Our sub's got into the harbor and torpedoed the tanker."

"That's what *you* think," Bulldozer answers.

"And it's what the Japs think, too," I tell him.

All over the bay, ships with steam up, are hauling up anchors so that they can get under way and dodge torpedoes. The crews aboard those with steam pressure too low for movement are taking to the boats.

"It's workin' out much better'n I figgered," Bulldozer says. "Hey, Ivan, with all them fishin' boats gettin' out of the bay, let's join 'em. I can't figger a better place to hide."

IV

"WHAT the hell did you do?" I ask Bulldozer.

But there ain't time for an answer. The glow of burning wharves and canneries is so great, American faces will show up, so we duck below, with just our eyes visible.

That Jap cruiser comes down the bay, zig-zagging. She cuts through a half dozen bunched fishing boats, smashing half of them into splinters, and drives toward the harbor mouth. Burning oil, spreading over the water, has got everything moving now. A freighter narrowly misses us, and as we near the jam building up inside the harbor mouth, Ivan takes the *No-Shirt Maru* inshore. He figgers the bigger ships will come through, and it'll be safer in shallow water.

We hit a couple of times, then out comes another tanker. Seven or eight fishing boats are run down, and larger craft following the tanker hit a few more. There're Japs and wreckage everywhere.

Below decks the smaller kids are yelling with fright, while the larger ones jump up and down and howl with excitement. Two miles dead ahead, violent sheets of flame streak the sky and the cruiser breaks up before our eyes. Three minutes later the tanker is torpedoed. Then in quick succession freighters go down. A blast leaps up from a reef to our starboard.

"That's one that missed a ship and hit a rock," Bulldozer yells.

"Talk Jap if you're going to yell like that," I bellow just as loud as he had done. "Do you want 'em to catch us? Right now they're in a mood to boil us in oil."

As we get clear of most fishing boats I slip into the wheelhouse and crouch down. "Ivan, don't get too close to big ships," I warn, "our submarine is having a field day, and we don't want to pick up a torpedo intended for big game."

"Sure," he answers, "I watch out. I am very happy. We are licking the Japs and I have saved my family."

"Yeah, that's right," I agreed. That is I agree out loud. Inwardly, I don't view the future through rose-colored glasses.

Sherwin had undoubtedly brought the submarine close to the harbor with the idear that the burning canneries would create a sky glow that would last for hours. It was

his hope, no doubt, that the silhouette of inbound or outbound steamers might offer him a target or two. He'd sure hit the jackpot when that exploding tanker had stampeded shipping generally.

But whether he would dare risk picking us up with the sea alive with Jap small craft was something else. Just because we were lucky enough to have pulled off a big deal, was no reason why a submarine should be risked to save us. It must save itself for more game. That's war. We were expendable. I figger it is a pious idear to let Sherwin know we're alive and kicking. I go below and start a fire in the stove, then I toss in some of that powder that'll give a red glow to the smoke coming from the stack.

FOR the first time I have a chance to really look at the kids Ivan had brought along. I thought the one that I had carried was a little fellow. He wasn't. He was thin from malnutrition—eyes retreating into their sockets; skin drawn like parchment across his cheek bones; even the nose little more than cartilage and skin; and blue veins standing out sharply at the temples.

"They all cry so much." Ivan's wife said, "but they don't cry as loud as they should. They're too tired."

"How many are yours?" I asked. She pointed them out. "What about the others?"

She smiles faintly and the sadness in her eyes deepens. "It seemed as if there was always one more that we couldn't leave behind." She nods toward the other woman. "My sister, she felt the same way. Even now it seems that we might have managed to bring along some of the others. It seems that way, now that we are safe."

Safe!

I groan. Still, it must seem safe to be amongst Americans again. Offhand I could not think of an insurance company that would have written a policy on her safety. I knew one thing. If the submarine did gamble and tried to take us aboard, the kids would go first. There were thirteen of 'em.

About that time the *No-Shirt Maru* goes over on her beam ends from a sharp turn, and Bulldozer moans, "That was a close one. A torpedo, No-Shirt. On deck. Quick!"

I break my neck getting on deck and he points, but I can't see nothing except a big steamer coming out of the harbor. Even as I open my mouth to ask questions, water and flame blot out the steamer and when the water settles I can see her going down bow first.

"That'll just about block the channel," Bulldozer says. "The torpedo would have hit us bow on if Ivan hadn't swung her over. Bubbles from its way hissed right in my face. You'd better get that red powder in the stove."

I went back down and tossed it in, and Bulldozer reports that the stuff is working. I hope it don't attract the wrong attention, but with so much going on the Japs will figger that it's a fire aboard.

Ivan's wife needs a hand with the kids, and while that ain't in my line, I do my best. Now that she's *safe* she feels like talking.

The Japs had kicked their way into their Aleutian Island homes before they knew what was happening. Women and children were put into boats and taken to a Jap transport. The idear was to force the older kids and the women to work in the canneries the coming season. They knew that many of the Aleuts are familiar with American cannery machinery. The Japs also figger they have ways of making 'em operate that machinery in case they refuse.

As far as the Japs were concerned, they're so many cogs in a machine. They figgered that if the real young kids died in the winter, it didn't matter. In spring they planned to build up those who would work so that they would be in condition for the salmon run. It was one way of saving grub. The stuff the Japs served their prisoners might keep a Jap alive, but it was no diet for people used to the American way of life.

Every one was in bad shape, and they had left behind others who were just as bad. I kept thinking, "There are some ship's cooks and a pharmacist's mate on that submarine who'll break their necks to get those kids in shape. If we can get 'em aboard."

We loaf along hour after hour, gradually leaving the other small craft behind as we head for the spot on the chart where we're supposed to meet the submarine. I feed more red powder into the stove. It's clear overhead, and the short day will start a little earlier this morning because of it.

An hour later me, Bulldozer and Ivan are

in the wheelhouse looking a couple of dozen ways at the same time. Suddenly Bulldozer says, "Listen, I hear the rush of water from a ship's bows. It's the sub."

"No it isn't," Ivan answers. "It's the turbines of a Jap destroyer. I've heard them too many times—cruising off the Aleutian Islands in thick weather. They did a lot of it, you know, so they'd learn all of the tricks." He draws a deep breath. "Go below and I'll try and bluff it through."

Me and Bulldozer take positions near the deadlights and try and see through the darkness. The sound of turbines gets louder, then commences to fade. "They didn't see us," Bulldozer says. "That was close."

I don't say a word. The Japs are full of tricks. I wait five minutes, hardly daring to hope, then the sound comes back again. About the time I spot what looks like a vague shape in the gloom, a golden flash stabs the air. "They've opened fire," Bulldozer says. "Keep the kids flattened out on the deck."

We both know there isn't a chance. One hit will smash the boat, but it keeps the women's minds off the danger. The shell screams overhead. The second one falls short. They've *straddled* us. The next should be a direct hit. Ivan changes the course. I watch for that dreaded flash that shows the destroyer's for'd turret has let go again. It's sure black out there, then suddenly it is a sullen red and in the glare I can see pieces of the destroyer going skyward.

"Torpedoed! I yell, and start a couple of kids howling.

While there's still pieces of wreckage blazing, a periscope cuts the water astern, a patch of water boils and up comes a conning tower. It's still shedding suds when the hatch opens and Sherwin's head pops out. "Jump aboard," he orders. "Lively."

"Stand by to receive kids, sir," I answer. "We've got thirteen, two mothers, me, Bulldozer and Ivan. Pete turned out to be a spy and was taken care of by Ivan."

"Good God!" Sherwin moans.

We tie up to the sub, sailors form a line, and the kids are passed aboard like pieces of cargo. Some are yellin' to beat hell, others are too scared to make a noise, and the older ones, who don't need much help, are mostly pop-eyed. The two women are crying with relief.

As I leave the *No-Shirt Maru,* a sailor jumps aboard and leaves a time-bomb. She's a Jap boat, and all that, but she sure's served us well, and I have a soft spot for her. I wish there was some way of keeping her as a souvenir.

"You certainly brought me a *cargo,*" Sherwin says.

"And here's something else, sir." I add, "charts, notes and photographs that were found on Pete. I hope they add up."

He whistles softly and says, "Go below, Mr. McGee. We've got to submerge. There's another Jap destroyer on the loose."

WHILE we put in the next eighteen hours on the bottom, the ship's cooks and the pharmacist's mate are in a row over the kids. The cooks want to give them too much good American chow, and the pharmacist's mate keeps warning them to lay off or we'll have a bunch of sick youngsters on our hands.

Overhead the destroyer jolts us with depth bombs.

It seems that Sherwin had waited off'n the harbor mouth, hoping to get shots at ships outlined by the glow of fires like I figgered, but he wasn't prepared for the stampede. He fires three fish at the cruiser and two of 'em hit. Then comes the tanker. After that it was swell shooting.

Afraid that destroyers would come out as soon as they got steam up, he had tried to sink a ship that would block the channel. He had spotted us, because of the red smoke from the stove pipe, and made allowance when he fired the torpedo, but Ivan had almost turned into it when he changed the *No-Shirt Maru's* course. A second change, and a quick one, had saved our lives.

With the help of sound gear, Sherwin had kept track of us, and followed along, waiting for a chance to surface and take us aboard. He had almost surfaced once when sound gear picked up the destroyer that later fired on the *No-Shirt Maru.* He had waited until she was in the right position, and let her have it.

"It turned out to be quite a cruise," he says to me and Bulldozer. "I'm out of torpedoes, and we'll be out of supplies if we don't arrive at base before those kids get their normal appetites back. But I don't suppose we'll ever know what made that Jap

tanker blow up. That made a raid turn into a rout. It couldn't have turned out better if we had planned it."

"It was planned, sir," Bulldozer says, "planned, as the feller says, on the spur of the moment."

"Who planned it?"

"I did, sir," Bulldozer answers. "You see when we was tied up to the oil wharf and the tide was out, I could see what was goin' on aboard the tanker. They'd emptied one of the tanks, and a Jap wearin' a mask to protect his lungs from gasoline fumes, went down inside and done some work. When he come out, he left the manhole hatch off."

"Interesting, Craig, continue," Sherwin says.

"To go back a-ways, a friend of mine once flipped a lighted match into a five-gallon gasoline can that had been empty for weeks," Bulldozer explains. "It exploded and damned near ruined him for life. It seems that gas fumes hang on for a long time, and mixed with air, plus a match create a sort of bomb."

"True."

"Well, sir, I figgered that empty tank aboard that tanker was a natural. I wrapped a time bomb, set for three o'clock, in some Jap matting, waited until a snow flurry hid things generally, then worked my way under the wharf and heaved the bomb through the hatch. A few minutes later, a couple of Japs come out, sweep away the snow, and put the hatch cover back on and dog it down," Bulldozer says.

"Turning the tank into a first-class bomb by confining the force of the explosion," Sherwin says. "I saw it through the periscope. It was a honey."

"You should've seen it, sir, from the reserved seat that we had," Bulldozer answers. "And I guess that's all."

Well, as it turns out, it isn't quite all. You see that old buzzard with his ears pinned back, and his chest struck out? That's me. The big cuss beside him with his chest stuck out is Bulldozer Craig. The reason they're sticking out their chests is to show off the Navy crosses they're wearing. An admiral pinned them on.

You can't see several thousand soldiers and sailors jabbering to beat hell, but I can tell you who they are. They're Japs that ain't getting their ration of canned salmon any more.

THAT SOMETHING EXTRA

By RAY MILLHOLLAND

At the End of the Fight the Question Was, Which One of Them Was It Who Was Drunk?

ANY one of those three huskies of the High Tension Construction Company who carried Shorty Burns into that tank town country doctor's office could have done it alone. The trouble was they were afraid an arm would drop off or some of Shorty's ribs would fall through just one man's pair of hands. He was cold-crocked and limp as a mustard plaster, which is saying even his ears were flopping, almost.

Well, the meat artist took one look at what Shorty's three sidekicks were bringing into his office and waved it out. "Take a spade and dig your man out of that mud. And do it outside," said the doc. "And hurry before my office gets loaded with germs."

Shorty was a mess, all right. Three pairs of arms had practically clam-shelled him out of a big puddle of sloppy spring mud in front of the town's beer joint where Shorty had got foolish, as usual, and tried to be alone when too many other people weren't in the notion of leaving just yet.

"Take him outside and sluice him off," repeated the doc.

Big Tom Young who was holding the looser parts of Shorty gave the crabby meat artist a hard stare and said, "He's a friend of ours. See? You're gonna splice and stay him back into shape, as is. And we're gonna watch."

A man doesn't have to go to college to be able to figure out what Big Tom would do next if things didn't go the way that he wanted 'em. The doc just shrugged and laid hold of a big pair of rib snips and started to cut Shorty out of his broad leather

safety belt and free his legs from the straps of his climbing irons.

"Don't go cutting up his equipment," warned Big Tom. "It's all tailor-made to him, and he'll be raising hell tomorrow case he finds any of his leather cut."

"This man," fired back the meat artist, pointing down at Shorty now laid out on his operating table, "will be lucky if he's able to wink three weeks from now."

Shorty looked bad enough the way he was, but when the doc got him shucked of his clothes and sponged off he looked that much worse. There wasn't a place on his body you could cover with a cross-arm bolt washer that wasn't either black and blue or bleeding. The bleeding places weren't cuts. Just places where the skin had been short of cube-steaked by the calks in some logger's boots that had worked on Shorty. You see, this high line the boys was stringing was smack dab through the last big tract of timber in the Pine River country. It was Saturday afternoon and pay-day for the high liners when this happened.

Finally after about an hour of sweating over Shorty the doc had time for a look at Big Tom, still standing by in case Shorty had any last words to pass out.

"Never saw the like," says the meat artist to Tom. "Not a bone broken. The man must be made of cast iron."

"Nothing as brittle as that," cracks back Tom. "He's forged steel, triple annealed from the middle out. Only, he thinks he's a car load of it, 'stead of just a double handful. Got too much imagination for six guys his size."

They slid Shorty onto a seat cushion of the pole-setting truck, dumped his irons and belt and his muddy clothes in the back end and rolled him slow and easy back to camp.

Bum Andrews was the main fuse of the job, and when he saw the shape Shorty was in he started peeling insulation off every man of the gang who had been in town with Shorty.

"What do you bindle stiffs mean, letting my best climber get in this shape?" he started yelling, sawing the air with both fists. "Don't you kegheads know we've got to string fifteen hundred feet by Monday night or get slapped in the neck with a big penalty for not finishing this section on time?"

THE gang just stood around because when Bum was excited it was downright dangerous to interrupt—like the time he started swinging an open-end wrench and cracked himself cold between the eyes and nobody on the gang could cash his check because Bum was still unconscious on Saturday and couldn't countersign 'em. An impulsive guy, you might say. Only he had an eye like a surveyor's transit when it came to lining up poles.

"Yah!" went on Bum bellowing at his crew. "Why don't somebody speak up and show me how we're going to make out with Shorty on the cooling slab like he is?"

Right then Shorty rolled over on one elbow and squinted out from under the bandage lattice-work and asks, "Who was them six guys who bounced the bartender's safe off my ribs after I was down?"

Nobody answered. It was too much like answering a ghost, hearing Shorty even so much as grunt when everybody expected it would be two weeks before he would be able to crawl out of the bunk trailer.

"Come on," says Shorty, sitting up. "Who wants to ride back to town and see me finish what I started?"

"You're slug-nutty," Bum lams at him. "Lay flat again or I'll—"

"You'll what, you big bum?" says Shorty, slow and meaning it. But he had to sink back on the cot he had been loaded onto after being carried from the truck. It was all he could do to keep his head up, he was still that groggy. "Listen," he begged, "ain't somebody gonna tell me who them six guys was?"

"If you'll feel any better, Shorty," Big Tom pipes up, "it wasn't six guys. It was just one big logger, name o' Moose Gallip, what slang you through the side of that ginmill."

Bum Andrews yanked at Big Tom's arm and growled, "Whaddya tell him that for? Now he'll be crying sick inside, account of one man doing him up."

Everybody else expected the same thing. But Shorty just sighed like he was beginning to feel comfortable again.

"Okay," he say. "Moose Gallip was his name, unh? Swell. Now I'll only have to stand trial for manslaughter of one punk, 'stead of six."

It wasn't anything human that kept that

little five-foot-two pole climber alive that night.

Somebody was sitting by his bunk every minute, and Bum ordered the fast pick-up trucks engine to be kept running in case the doc had to be sent for in a hurry. And all day Sunday it was pretty much the same thing—Shorty hardly so much as wiggling the end of his nose, clear on past noon.

Then Bum Andrews came in about three in the afternoon and took one more look at Shorty and then came out and said to big Tom, "It's up to you to set cross arms and insulator pins tomorrow."

Right away Big Tom backed off. "You ain't doing that to me, Bum," he said. "I'll dig holes in solid rock with my bare hands before I'll go up another pole. You know that high stuff makes my head spin since I fell last time."

"Just for tomorrow, Tom," begged Bum Andrews. "We gotta string that fifteen hundred feet or else—"

"Try one of them loggers in town, why don'tcha?" says Tom. "I heard that Moose Gallip bragging he could climb poles, raw nekked, faster'n any man in our gang using irons."

"He did?" asks Bum sticking his ear out to make sure he was hearing right. Off he goes to town in the fast pick-up.

Don't ask how Bum Andrews persuaded a logger in his right mind—even if he was out of a job—to shin up poles and do the top work. Anyway, he brought his man back that night and passed the word around that as long as Shorty was flat on his back, this Moose Gallip was to be left strictly all in one piece.

"After that, I won't be seeing so good, maybe," said Bum, and everybody knew they had a free ticket to swing on the big logger if it looked good to 'em."

But this Moose Gallip stood a hat higher than Big Tom. That's saying he was topping six-feet-three by a hand with the thumb standing straight up, and no baby's hand either. Bright and cheery Monday morning Moose was on the job.

"We'll start you off easy on this forty-footer," says Bum Andrews shooting an arm over Moose's shoulder and pointing to the last pole set on Saturday. "Maybe you'd better get a belt and a pair of irons. It's a long way down and lotsa splinters if you slip."

Moose Gallip takes a long squint up at the pole and drawls, "After I get up there, what do I do? Top her with a hand saw?"

"That ain't no lightning-struck tree," explains Bum, chewing his temper between his teeth. "See that notch up there and a hole in it? Well, you shin, climb, swim, or fly up there with a line fast to your belt. Then you grab the pole with six arms and ten legs, case you don't wear a belt, and haul up a cross arm with two other hands you may or may not have free."

"That's kid stuff," says Moose Gallip spitting on two palms as hard and slick as an ax handle. "C'mon, gimme the tools and bolts."

He got 'em. Big Tom shoved about ten pounds of bolts into the waistband of Moose's lumberjack pants, hands him a hand ax and a wrench and a coil of line.

"Okay, jaybird," says Tom. "You're loaded; now fly. And straight up."

WHAT does Moose Gallip do but clamp his teeth over the handle of his hand ax, loop his coil of line over his wrist. Slap! Slap! go those two big hands around the pole, and he was six feet off the ground before Big Tom could shift his chew to the other cheek.

"Hey, you big cheese, come down from there!"—Nobody expected it; but here comes Shorty, all bandaged up and the loop of his belt dangling and his climbing irons clanking as he staggered to the pole and started up after Moose. "Come down and fight if you want my job," yells Shorty.

Halfway up the pole, Moose Gallip crooks one leg around it and leans out and down like an acrobat in a circus. He squints one eye and then the other, then squirts a streak of tobacco juice at Shorty.

"What you doing playing hookey from school, sonny?" he fires down, sarcastic, at Shorty.

"Come down, you leaking pole cat!" screeches Shorty, starting to swell all over like a mashed thumb. "That's my job, you—"

Bum Anderson hears the racket and high tails it over to the war zone. One look at Shorty mostly dressed in forty yards of bandages except for his irons and his belt

and Bum yells at Big Tom, "Throw a sack over that wild cat and drag him back to bed!"

A good half hour was wasted trying to get Shorty back to bed where he belonged. It could have been done quicker but Bum Anderson wouldn't stand for anybody cracking Shorty back of the ear with a cant hook handle. After that, things went on quiet and easy again.

Up to the last pole, that is. The pole-setting truck picked up the last stick right next to camp and dropped it in the hole Big Tom and his gang had just finished. Up swaggers Moose Gallip, decked out with his line coiled over one arm and his hand ax clamped in his teeth, like nothing ever seen around a high line camp before.

Bum Anderson took one look at Shorty's good eye spitting fire from the bunk trailer window and says to Moose, "You been doing okay, fella. Let one of the other boys climb this one."

"Yah!" snorts Shorty from the bunk trailer. "If this window wasn't so small and that door nailed shut on me, I'd be out there and climb you, you big slob!"

The way Moose Gallip slapped his hands on that last pole, fixing to start up, wasn't the way a man who cared a hoot about another guys feelings would have done it. He seemed to be getting a big kick out of stealing Shorty's job right out from under his nose.

And all Shorty could do was grunt and cuss and watch Moose Gallip horse up a cross arm and set the bolts home.

"Somebody pass me up a rocking chair and a banjo," drawls down Moose, "and I'll sing that little squirt a lullaby. How about 'Rockabye Baby', sonny?"

"You shut your big mouth up there!" bawls Bum Anderson. "Get that cross-arm braced so we can start the wire winch."

By four-thirty that section of the line was done. The power company's inspectors gave it the okay and handed Bum Anderson a clean bill on it.

"That's all for today," says Bum, waving the gang to the cook trailer. "Grub up heavy and get a good sleep tonight. Tomorrow we break camp."

Then Moose Gallip walks up with his mackinaw slung over his shoulder and holds out a bushel-basket size hand. "Well, I showed you monkies how a man climbs a stick, Mister. Now I'll be beating it where there's real work for a man my size."

"Listen, you yellow-billed sapsucker," yaps Shorty from the bunk trailer, "you're scared is what's the matter with you. Yeh, scared they'll let me out and I'll pull your arms and legs off and stuff 'em down your loud mouth, is what. Open this door, somebody!"

Moose takes a long grin at Shorty's red face—what you could see of it—and drops his big hand.

"Guess I'll stick around," he says to Bum Anderson. "It's sorta fun listening to that little chimpanzee chattering. Hi, Jocko, lika da banan?"

"Okay," says Bum to Moose. "You can stick around. But lay off Shorty. That little guy would be dangerous if he was stuffed with cotton and in a wire cage in a sideshow."

Moose Gallip hitched up his belt and laughed. "Listen, I could eat six like him on the half shell."

"Just maybe," grunts Bum Anderson and walks off.

It took all day Tuesday to shift camp and set up again. On Wednesday Bum Anderson turned out his crew. And who should show up for breakfast in the cook trailer but Shorty. This time he had his pants on and his irons strapped to his legs, ready for business.

Big as life, Shorty planks himself down at the table and spears six ten-inch flapjacks right off Moose Gallip's fork. Moose Gallip reaches out for the last three on the platter, and Shorty swipes them off his fork, too.

Bum Anderson reaches over and yanks away Shorty's plate and throws the whole bunch of flapjacks out the door. "Two double orders on the hook!" he yells back at the cook. Then he clamps an eye on Shorty. "Any more funny business outta you and back you go in the calaboose. Moose, you're riding the pick-up to the other end of the section. We're stringing from both ends this time."

Moose just looked over at Shorty and laughed. And if it hadn't been for Big Tom and Bum Anderson grabbing Shorty, that little half-pint would have gone over the table after Moose, right then and there.

But they didn't mix because Bum kept them at opposite ends of the job. By the time night came around Shorty was all in and creaking at every joint. He had bolted up six more cross-arms than any other pole man on the job but he was too groggy even to fling it up to Moose when they ate supper that night.

Two days running, it was like that. Bum Anderson was afraid Shorty was going out cold on a pole any minute and tried to get him to slow down. But Shorty was right up the next pole and working faster.

"Some guys are like that," Tom told Bum that night while they were talking about the best way to get wire across a deep gully they would have to span the next day. "The madder they get at somebody, the more poison they make inside. Sooner or later they get to the place they gotta cut loose. Better can this Moose off the job before something bad happens."

"Okay," nods Bum. "We'll have the back broken on the top work tomorrow. I'll pay off Moose and that'll be the end of it. He'll be gone back into the woods before Shorty hits town again."

"He'll kill that little squirt if he don't," grumbled Tom. "And in a way, I'm for it. Shorty needs a good lesson. A good thorough job of killing would be the makings of him."

THE next night Moose got his time, like Bum promised. But he stuck around till Shorty came dragging his irons back into camp. What does he do but walk up to Shorty and shove out his big fist.

"I was likkered up and didn't know what I was doing when I busted you up in town, fella," he says to Shorty, same as if Shorty was his size and weight. "Shake, ball hooter!"

Shorty sort of swallowed his tongue for a minute. Working with timber like he'd been doing for years he knew when a lumberjack called a man a "ball hooter" he was passing out his best compliment.

"Okay, Moose," says Shorty sticking out his fist. "And you ain't so bad at shinning a pole yourself."

Well, that looked like a couple of funerals had been headed off nice and sweet. Bum sent his crew back on the job next morning. The wire kept creeping down the side of the hill and across the valley like it was alive and didn't need any help. And the boys were working the extra hour of daylight and piling up time-and-a-half for overtime and beginning to talk about the fun they were going to have in town, Saturday night. Outside of a slight limp, Shorty looked as good as ever.

"Just remember," Bum Anderson told his crew when he passed out their pay Saturday noon, "just remember I'm running no field hospital at this camp. So any of you birds what gets short-circuited from war water had better hire a bed in the county hospital in advance."

The boys all grin and swarm aboard the commissary truck and the fast pick-up and begin yelling at the drivers to start changing the scenery right now. Big Tom Young was at the wheel of the pick-up and yelled for Shorty to sit up front in the cab with him.

Clank, went something inside the leg of Shorty's pay-day pants when he bumped the steering post sliding in beside Big Tom.

"Hey, what's the idea of wearing your climbers during the cocktail hour?" growled Tom.

Shorty grinned back like a kid caught red-handed trying to crawl in bed with his cowboy chaps and spurs on. "They sort of brace my weak ankles," he told Big Tom without batting an eye.

Big Tom just grunted and got his truck rolling for town. Nobody else said anything. It was a man's own blamed business what he wore. Besides, ribbing Shorty was pretty close to the same mistake as tickling a rattlesnake under the chin; he just didn't have that kind of a sense of humor.

Bumping over the tracks at the edge of town, Shorty nudged Tom and said, "Drop me off at the Post Office. I gotta send that kid brother of mine at college a money order."

"It's the kid's last year, ain't it?" asked Tom.

"Yeah. He graduates next month," answered Shorty, grinning like he was his kid brother's old man. "Yeah, and maybe some day, Tom, the kid'll be bossing ignorant punks like us around. Yeah, and he's the only guy in the world who can cold-crock me in a free-for-all. You should see the shoulders on the kid, Tom."

Maybe Big Tom was thinking about that mauling Moose Gallip had given Shorty just the week before. But he didn't even smile if he was. Not until Shorty had unloaded and had crowded his way into the dinky Post Office with about a dozen of the married men of the crew that had families to send home money to, anyway.

Naturally the rest of the gang made a bee-line for the beer joint down in the next block. Pretty soon all hands had their fists around a tall one with a white collar on it.

Then somebody called for a shot of rye. But the bartender shook his head. "Not in here, boys. My license don't let me. You can get it by the bottle acrost the street, but please don't bring any in here."

Big Tom set down his glass and said, "Hello, Moose. Thought you'd be back logging by this time."

Moose Gallip wiped off the mouth of his quart bottle of liquor and took another long drink. He was red clear up back of his ears and his eyes had a nasty snarl in them.

"Who the hell cares what you monkeys think?" he fired back at Tom. He drained what was left in his bottle in one gulp and let it fly through a back window. "See that?" he asked, giving everybody a chance to look him in the face. "Well, that's how I slung that loud-mouthed little pole-climber outta here last Sat'dy night. This is another Sat'dy night. Who else wants to get throwed outta here? Gotta mind to throw all you cheap monkeys outta here so I can have some decent comp'ny, is what!"

Big Tom had his fist around a truck driver's arm and was holding him back, when the crowd split wide open. In walks Shorty, coming springy on the balls of his feet and his nose up like a bull terrier smelling trouble.

"Whose calling us a bunch of cheap monkeys?" he wanted to know.

BIG TOM reached out with his other hand and nailed Shorty's arm too. "Forget it," he growled in Shorty's ear. "It's just Moose. He's likkered too high to know what he's saying."

Right then Moose Gallip saw that it was Shorty. A big grin spread over his face as he walked over and looked down.

"Well, if it ain't the little monkey, hisself!" he said, slapping Shorty's hat down over his eyes. "Well, I don't like monkeys, see? And I don't like monkeys, special, without flat noses. See?"

Big Tom still had his fingers locked around Shorty's arm. So the little guy couldn't duck when Moose Gallip's flat-handed smack landed flush on Shorty's nose and mouth.

That was too much for the gang. Before Shorty quit spinning to hit the floor with a loud thump, Moose Gallip was in the middle of a circle of hard fists.

Then up bounced Shorty, sizzling like a roman candle going off at both ends and spitting loose teeth. "Stand back, the rest of you!" he screeched. "This big clown is my meat. Stand back!"

Big Tom made a grab for Shorty and missed. "Let 'em tear Moose apart," he tried to tell Shorty. "Lay away or he'll fix you worse than he did last week. He's likker mad, I tell you."

"Stand back and let me at him!" yelled Shorty, shoving back men twice his weight as if they were half his size.

Big Tom gave the boys the nod and they fell back, fists still cocked though and every eye clamped on Moose Gallip.

Then Big Tom said to Moose, "Fella, you got too much likker under your belt. You'd better crawl in a bed some place and sleep it off."

Moose Gallip wasn't paying any attention. He kept looking around for Shorty, like a kid who has let his pet frog get away from him.

"Hey where's my little monkey gone to?" he asked. "I gotta make his nose flatter—"

"Right here!" screeches Shorty, diving through the gang and swinging a sizzler at Moose's jaw.

Naturally he didn't connect by better than a foot, because Moose's jaw was way up there out of his reach. Moose laughed and caught Shorty a back-hand slap that spun him half around.

A couple of the boys moved in to stop the massacre. But Shorty started belting right and left. "He's my meat. Lay off!"

Back goes Shorty at Moose. This time he sunk a fist almost up to his elbow in Moose's belt. When the big man doubled over he got a left jolt on the lips that started him to spitting blood and teeth too.

"Now we're even!" yaps Shorty.

Moose backed off a step and glared down at Shorty. His hand slid along the bar behind him and knocked down an empty beer bottle. Just then Shorty stung him again in the ribs with a one-two punch that sounded like hitting an empty water keg.

That touched off a short fuse inside Moose some place. He let out an angry snarl and slammed the beer bottle straight at Shorty's head. It didn't hit solidly. Shorty came out of his quick dodge with blood gushing from a long split over his left eyebrow.

"So this is a free-for-all, unh?" screeched Shorty before a man could get between them. "Okay, Moose, I'll show you how a lineman fights!"

In the bat of an eyelash Shorty was at his man again. But this time his hands were open. Zing, went the three-inch steel spur of Shorty's climbing iron into the flesh of Moose Gallip's right leg, just below the knee. Zing, went the other spur into the inside of a big thigh.

Shorty went up his man like climbing a big chestnut pole and nailed him by the throat with his left hand. Then a right, hard as the head of a cross-arm bolt, snapped back and landed flush under Moose's left ear.

For a second or two it was as quiet as in the middle of a cedar swamp. Then Moose went down like a big rotten tree falling of its own weight.

Big Tom turned to the bartender and said, "Set up everybody in the house on me."

The whole crowd moved to the bar without giving Moose another look. He had got what was coming to him and that was that. All except Shorty, that is.

Shorty was on his knees on the floor beside Moose. He ripped open the big logger's pant legs and jabbed his two thumbs into the gaping wounds made by his steel spurs.

"Help me, you birds!" he yelled at the gang. "Get this guy to the doctor. He's bleeding to death."

"What the hell, Shorty," somebody said. "He asked for a dirty fight, didn't he? Well, he's got it. Anyways, he ain't in half as bad shape as he left you in last Saturday."

But Shorty wouldn't let up squawking until his man was picked up and carried to the doctor's office.

"Don't let him die, Doc," begged Shorty, shucking fives and tens down on the operating table. "Whatever it costs, don't let him die."

The doc said, "Somebody haul this wild cat away while I work on this big fool," and went on jabbing a needle into Moose Gallip's meat and sewing up the wounds.

All the time, Shorty stood at the end of the operating table, swabbing Moose's face with a wet towel and saying, "Honest, Moose, I didn't mean to take advantage of a swell guy like you. Wake up, Moose. Don't go and die on me, Moose!"

"Nerts!" growled Big Tom. "The guy ain't hardly scratched and here you're bawling over him."

About then Moose opened his eyes. The liquor glare was gone. He straightened up with a puzzled frown and watched the doc taking the last stitch in the deep gash below his knee.

"Was I in a train wreck or something?" he asked, still puzzled.

"Worse," grunted Big Tom and not showing any sympathy. "You started fighting dirty with Shorty."

Moose Gallip shook his head. "I might've been fighting, but not with Shorty. Him and me made up." He looked over his shoulder and saw Shorty standing right behind the operating table. "Ain't that right, Shorty? A couple a pals like you and me wasn't fighting, now was we?"

Damned if Shorty wasn't blubbering all over his own bloody shirt front when he put an arm around Moose Gallip's shoulder. "It was the likker that done it, Moose," he said. "Honest, Moose, I'd've never done it to you if I wasn't fight-crazy with likker. Remember how you was the last time we tangled? Well, I was the same way this time—just didn't know my friends from a freight brakeman."

Moose grinned and grabbed Shorty's hand. "No hard feelings, you little ten-ton load of dynamite!"

The rest of the gang looked at each other but said nothing.

If Shorty wanted to tell a big lie like that, it was his own business. Besides it was downright dangerous to be shoving your oar into Shorty's affairs without he asked you to.

Before the War, the Doughty Little Captain Said, He'd Never Have Thought of Such a Thing

HEAVE TO!

By PATRICK O'KEEFFE

Author of "Arms Cargo," etc.

IF A history of the Allied supply route to the Middle East via the Cape of Good Hope is ever written, it will hardly be complete without the story of the *Almirante* and her little Dutch captain. And it will best be told from the point of view of Mr. Stroud, who was her chief mate at the time, and whose life was held in ransom by a U-boat officer, with the ship and her valuable cargo of war materials as the ultimate stake.

Mr. Stroud, a quiet young man of light build and dark appearance, was second mate of the big American freighter *Almirante* on the occasion of her transfer, early in 1941, to Panama registry, for charter to the British Government. Mr. Stroud was the only one of her American complement who chose to remain with her, the inducements being the offer of the chief mate's berth, and a change from the monotony of unexciting monthly voyages to Porto Rico. Her new captain, Jan Willem, the rest of his officers, and most of the crew were nationals of the belligerent or the occupied countries of Europe.

On the first voyage under her new flag, the *Almirante* set out for the Red Sea with supplies and munitions consigned to the British desert armies. The voyage passed without incident until the vessel was roughly in mid-ocean, to the southwest of the Cape Verde Islands. Late one afternoon, during his watch on the bridge, Mr. Stroud sighted two lifeboats, over on the port bow. He called Captain Willem. The round little Dutchman appeared in shirt sleeves, munching a piece of toast served with his customary four o'clock tea and lemon. He leveled the heavy telescope at the distant boats, while Mr. Stroud viewed them again through his less powerful binoculars.

The captain suddenly lowered the telescope. "Germans!" He virtually spat the word out. "I can make out 'Hamburg' on the stern of the nearest boat." As a youth in the British coasting trade, Captain Willem

had learned to speak English without a foreign accent.

"Strange," remarked Mr. Stroud. "A German crew adrift in these waters. I wonder what happened to their ship."

"It's obvious they didn't scuttle her at the approach of a British warship—they'd have been rescued," said the captain with bitterness.

"I'd better see about getting a ladder ready," suggested Mr. Stroud.

"I haven't said I'll pick them up," replied the captain.

Mr. Stroud gave him a sharp look. The captain's light blue eyes were glittering.

"Do the U-boats bother about the men they leave to die in open boats?" demanded the captain.

"No," murmured Mr. Stroud, "but simply because the Germans—"

"I know what you're going to say," interrupted the captain with sudden passion. "We mustn't do unto them as they do unto us. But you didn't see the massacre of Rotterdam. Your wife and family weren't wiped out by a German bomb on the house you'd lived in practically all your married life. You didn't spend twelve days adrift in the wintry Atlantic, with only two out of seventeen of us being picked up alive. You weren't at the evacuation of Greece, on a ship packed with refugees who only served to draw the dive bombers."

MR. STROUD was silent. When Captain Willem had told him, earlier in the voyage, of these horrors that he had suffered, he had broken down with grief over the loss of his wife and two young daughters. But now, as he stood gazing at the distant boats, his gray head thrust grimly forward, he seemed inflamed with a desire to avenge them.

"You won't beat the German with tenderheartedness," the captain went on. "You've got to be every bit as cold-blooded—more so, in fact. Let him see that instead of cowing you, he only makes you want to kill him." The captain paused, and then, in a sudden change of voice, he asked, "Apart from anything else, why should I take the risk of stopping to pick up these Germans?"

"If a U-boat were hereabouts," said Mr. Stroud, "rather than torpedo us, she'd be more likely to try and capture us and turn us over to that German crew as a prize. She'd have shown herself by now."

Captain Willem did not reply. And Mr. Stroud felt that the captain had really been giving vent to his hatred for the Germans rather than expressing any intention to commit reprisals. This thought gave relief to Mr. Stroud, whose humanitarian sense had never been subjected to the withering blast of brutality.

CAPTAIN WILLEM presently gave an order to the helmsman, who immediately turned his wheel left and headed the ship in the direction of the two boats. They had now hoisted sails, apparently to attract the attention of the steamer, for they were of no other use in the dead calm now prevailing during a lull in the Northeast Trades. Through the glasses, Mr. Stroud was able to distinguish the figures of the men, all facing the approaching freighter.

Captain Willem fetched a megaphone, and, as the *Almirante* was passing close to the first boat, he leaned out of the bridge wing and hailed in English.

"What ship are you from?"

A burly man in soiled whites, sitting beside the tiller, cupped his hands about his mouth.

"Motorship *Helga* of Hamburg. I am Captain Otto Traber." He spoke his name as if he were someone of consequence.

"The blockade runner?" ejaculated Captain Willem.

"That iss right."

"What happened to *Helga?*"

"Struck a submerged wreck two nights ago."

Captain Willem turned and exchanged looks with Mr. Stroud. Only the other day they had discussed recent German propaganda reports boasting of the *Helga's* success in running the British blockade on a voyage from Bordeaux to Rio de Janeiro.

"I wonder if he saved the telegram of congratulations from his beloved Fuehrer," jeered Captain Willem. "And I wonder how he'll explain losing his ship on the return voyage—through the hulk of some German raider's victim, I hope."

The *Almirante* was now leaving the first boat astern and nearing the second. It held twenty men, Mr. Stroud counted, as against fifteen in the other. All appeared to be in

good health, but displaying anxiety, as if they feared that the ship did not intend to stop. Captain Willem appeared to be oblivious of them; he seemed absorbed in other thoughts. Mr. Stroud was about to query him when suddenly the captain went to the engine-room telegraph and set the indicator at "Stop."

"Before we sailed," he said, turning to Mr. Stroud, "the Naval Control Service Officer told me that a U-boat stopped a ship on this run and demanded to see her papers. The German Intelligence, it is thought, is seeking information about the exact nature of the cargoes being shipped to the Middle East. I was instructed that in such an event I was to destroy my papers and scuttle the ship. With Captain Otto Traber and his crew aboard, I don't believe it will be necessary to do either."

The captain then told Mr. Stroud that every man was to be searched as he came aboard. "I don't want Captain Traber to have the pleasure of offsetting the loss of the *Helga* by steaming a prize ship laden with American-made war materials into a German port," he added.

THE Germans who came up the *Almirante's* side were a mixture of middle-aged men and youths. One or two of the latter impudently gave Captain Willem the Nazi salute. The little Dutch captain had put on a white uniform coat, on the breast of which he proudly wore a tiny bow of orange ribbon, symbol of fealty to the House of Orange. He stood to one side, with a drawn revolver, while two sailors promptly searched each German as he jumped down from the fore bulwark to the well deck.

Sheath knives were found on a few of the seamen, and pistols on the officers. Captain Otto Traber displayed anger as a pair were removed from his hip pockets, covered by his white jacket.

"It vould haff been a courtesy to ask us to surrender our arms," he said.

"Not with men who make a virtue of treachery," snapped Captain Willem.

When the last man was aboard, Captain Willem ordered the two lifeboats hoisted on to the after well deck. Then he disposed of the matter of providing accommodation for the Germans.

"Empty the mail room," he told Mr. Stroud. "Give them whatever spare bedding and blankets are available."

THE mail room was at the end of the port alleyway, next to the *Almirante's* six passenger staterooms, which were unoccupied on the present voyage. There also being no mail, the mail room was being used for an overflow of ship's stores. With its barred portholes and steel walls, it made an ideal prison. But to Mr. Stroud it seemed hardly the place to put the Germans while the staterooms were available; he felt that they could as safely be locked in them and guarded.

"It'll be pretty cramped—all jammed in the mail room," he said. "They could be put—"

"I want them kept in the mail room," said the captain with abruptness.

Neither during the rest of that evening nor all the following day did Captain Willem give even a hint of the manner in which he intended to use the Germans to preserve his ship from possible destruction. Mr. Stroud had found him to be an uncommunicative sort of man, but he felt that so much secrecy was imposed upon him by the war, such as particulars of routes, codes, signals, that secretiveness was becoming a habit with him.

Nevertheless, Mr. Stroud was unable to put aside his curiosity, and while pacing the bridge on the second morning after the rescue, he decided to query Captain Willem. The little Dutchman came up at six o'clock, as was his custom. The ship was now in the doldrums, making her own breeze at twelve knots, and the climbing red sun was not yet warm.

"About those Germans," Mr. Stroud began, as the captain leaned on the rail beside him. "You said—"

He was interrupted by a yell from the crow's nest. Both he and the captain started upright, switching their eyes in the direction shouted by the lookout. Something like a spar was slicing through the glassy sea; it was pushed clear of the surface by a round streaming base, and other superstructure rose fore and aft as if by magic to complete the silhouette of a U-boat, about a thousand yards off the starboard bow.

Figures appeared on the submarine's deck, and a two-flag hoist went up. Mr.

Stroud hurried for his binoculars. The flags drooped in the still air, but the signalman was shaking them out with the halyards to make them recognizable. Mr. Stroud made out the international two-letter signal "OL," meaning, "Heave to or I will fire on you."

For a slow, unarmed ship, with T.N.T. and other explosives in her holds, it would have been folly not to obey. Captain Willem acted as if he had drilled himself for this moment. He stepped quickly to the engine-room telegraph, saying to Mr. Stroud.

"Shake the second third mates. Tell them to abandon ship at once. Use the *Helga's* boats, too. Then bring one of the German sailors up here, one who can speak English. Don't let any of the rest out."

As Mr. Stroud hastened below, he mused that he was about to see the captain's plan executed rather than be told of it. He was thankful that the U-boat had been encountered in a lightly patrolled area, where a submarine could leisurely stop a neutral-flag ship and sink her by gunfire or bombs if found to be carrying contraband; he wouldn't care to have a torpedo burst among that T.N.T. in number two hold. But the U-boat had doubtless chosen this spot, if she wanted information about the cargo. At the same time, Mr. Stroud was a little uneasy about the captain's order not to release all the Germans. It was as puzzling as his order to abandon ship, which somehow did not seem to fit in with his remark of two days ago that it would not be necessary to destroy the papers or scuttle the ship.

MR. STROUD aroused his sleeping juniors, one a Dane, the other a Yugo-Slav. Then, getting the key from the captain's cabin, he went down to the mail room. He startled the armed sailor standing guard outside by ordering him on deck to abandon ship. He unlocked the door. The Germans were asleep. One of them, a steward who he knew could speak fluent English, was lying near the door. Mr. Stroud wakened him and drew him outside, to finish dressing in the alleyway. A few of the others awoke, and, showing by their expressions that they realized that the engines had stopped, they jumped up and hurried to the ports; but the submarine was not visible from that side. Mr. Stroud hastily pulled the door to and locked it.

When Mr. Stroud arrived back on the bridge, Captain Willem had just finished receiving a blinker message from the U-boat.

"They want to see the ship's papers," he said, walking to the ladder. On the deck below, the second and third mates were mustering the crew round the *Almirante's* two lifeboats.

"Man the starboard boat for a trip to the submarine," the captain called down. "All the rest of you get into the port boat and the *Helga's* boats."

Returning, he shot a brief glance at the *Helga's* steward, who was jubilantly gazing at the U-boat, and said to Mr. Stroud:

"You will go over to the submarine, but without the papers. Tell the commander I have Captain Otto Traber and his crew locked up here. Take this man with you as proof. Also, he will be able to make the following clear in case their English is poor: Tell the commander that if he destroys this ship, he will destroy Captain Traber and his men at the same time. Give him to understand that if he makes any attempt to take them off, I'll blow up the ship myself."

Mr. Stroud was startled. "You really mean that?"

Captain Willem set his jaw. He went to the ladder again, and called down. A Norwegian engineer, who was also the ship's electrician, came part way up the steps.

"Get me a battery and the longest piece of twin cable you've got—long enough to reach from down in number two hold up to the bridge," the captain ordered.

He came back to Mr. Stroud. "By the time you reach the submarine, I'll have opened one of the cases of T.N.T. in the hold, put in a few sticks of dynamite, and connected the battery and wire. That should convince you, and help you to convince the U-boat commander, that I mean what I say."

"But what—what about yourself?" stammered Mr. Stroud.

"When you hate as we've been made to hate," replied the captain intensely, "you fight to the very end, and by every possible means. I'm fighting for this ship and cargo, and these Germans aboard are my price for their safety. If I lose, it will be at the cost of every German life on board, and no German U-boat commander will be able to mock me for lacking the courage to carry out my word."

A shout from the second mate announced that the boat was ready.

"Don't be in too big a hurry to get there," the captain said to Mr. Stroud. "I need time to make my preparations, and I want to give the boats a chance to get well clear if I have to blow up the ship."

Mr. Stroud acknowledged with a reluctant nod and turned away. He felt that it would be futile to try to dissuade Captain Willem from going through with his plan. Mr. Stroud had little enthusiasm for his mission. He did not believe that the U-boat commander would submit tamely to the ultimatum, though he would undoubtedly hesitate to kill thirty-four of his countrymen, especially thirty-four who had recently distinguished themselves as blockade runners. But he, too, might have a trick or so up his sleeve, thought Mr. Stroud uneasily.

Mr. Stroud glanced at the German steward. His jubilation had turned to alarm, and when Mr. Stroud gave him a sign he hastened down the ladder as if fearing that Captain Willem might change his mind about allowing him to be the only one of the *Helga's* crew to escape the fate that might come to his shipmates. Mr. Stroud followed him down to the boat, going just as he was, in khaki trousers and white shirt bearing no emblems of rank.

When the boat had pulled a little distance away from the ship, Mr. Stroud looked back. Except for signs of activity around the boats, the *Almirante* lay as if paralyzed by the presence of her deadly undersea enemy. He thought about the imprisoned Germans. They must know now, from the sounds overhead, that the ship was being abandoned and were perhaps panicky with the fear that they were being left behind. He understood now why Captain Willem had confined them in the steel-walled mail room; in their terror they would have smashed down the flimsy wooden doors of the staterooms, and interfered with his plan. Mr. Stroud was appalled by the thought that every single one of them might soon be blown to bits. And yet, he conceded, it was only what the Germans themselves had asked for—total war. Captain Willem was simply matching their ruthlessness, as he had preached.

Despite the easy stroke he set them, Mr. Stroud's crew of five were a little out of breath and perspiring when the boat slid alongside the submarine. Mr. Stroud was helped aboard. A sailor promptly removed an automatic from Mr. Stroud's hip pocket; Captain Willem had told him and the other two mates to carry one at all times while the *Helga's* men were aboard. It was the first time he had stood on the deck of a submarine, and she appeared to him to be a large craft of wide range and recent build, with what was possibly a four-inch gun on the fore deck. Three officers in wrinkled white drills were regarding him from the high conning tower.

The *Helga's* steward had followed Mr. Stroud unbidden. Giving the Nazi salute, he began to talk excitedly in German. The faces of the three officers grew black as they listened. One of them, a dark, austere-looking man about thirty, fixed Mr. Stroud with gray, piercing eyes.

"This man," he said in slowly spoken English, "informs me that he is a survivor of the Reich Motorship *Helga.* He says that Captain Traber and his officers and crew are prisoners on your ship. Your captain threatens to blow them up vit her if I try to take them off."

"That is quite true," said Mr. Stroud.

The commander went into a hurried consultation with one of his subordinates, while the other kept a lookout with binoculars. The commander shot an occasional question at the *Helga's* steward. Finally he spoke curtly to the lookout officer, who promptly disappeared below.

The commander felt for his own binoculars, hanging from a leather strap slung round his neck, and focused them on the *Almirante.* Gazing in the same direction, Mr. Stroud saw that the other boats were pulling away from her, their oars rising and falling rapidly like the limbs of frightened crabs. Captain Willem had apparently told the men of his ultimatum, and they were seemingly not gambling on its success.

The officer reappeared on the conning tower, and swung down the hand-grips to the deck. He now wore side-arms. He was followed by half a dozen men, in whites and similarly armed. Mr. Stroud regarded them in dismay. It was as he had feared; the U-boat commander was not submitting tamely. Either he believed that Captain Willem was bluffing, or else he had a scheme of his own.

"Captain Willem will carry out his word," Mr. Stroud warned, and then added, though suspecting that the *Helga's* steward had already supplied the information, "There are two hundred cases of T.N.T. as well as dynamite, demolition bombs, and other explosives in the holds. He has laid an electric cable in readiness to detonate them."

The U-boat commander seemed unimpressed. "Get into your boat," he said curtly.

Mr. Stroud hung back for a brief moment. If the U-boat commander was sending his men to board the *Almirante*, in the belief that Captain Willem was bluffing, it would be going to certain death to accompany them. But he had no choice; if he refused to go, he would be ignominiously thrown into the boat. With a sense of doom, Mr. Stroud took his place in the stern, beside the German officer, who had taken the tiller. The six U-boat sailors also were in the boat. The *Helga's* steward remained on the submarine. The commander issued some last instructions in German to his officer, and then the boat shoved off.

Mr. Stroud glanced sidewise at the U-boat officer. He was a blond young man of about his own age of twenty-five. "What are you going to do?" Mr. Stroud asked tensely.

"You vill see," was all the satisfaction he got.

The boat headed back to the ship under a swifter stroke set by the U-boat officer. As it drew close to the *Almirante,* Mr. Stroud saw that Captain Willem was standing in the wing of the bridge, grimly watching their approach. The little Dutchman did not stir until the boat was within hailing distance; he then lifted a megaphone with one hand, and held up the bared ends of the twin electric wire with the other.

"Make no attempt to come aboard," he shouted.

The boat's crew stopped rowing; they had overheard enough to enable them to understand the significance of the captain's warning. The U-boat officer drew his pistol. He snapped an order in German, and the U-boat sailors promptly took over the oars.

"Captain Willem means what he says," cried Mr. Stroud desperately.

The U-boat officer coldly ignored him. He was steering the boat toward the falls and lifelines hanging from the empty davits, as if intending to swarm up them with his men. Mr. Stroud felt sick. It seemed that nothing now could save them all from annihilation except failure of the captain's improvised method for detonating the explosives.

When the boat was almost abreast the bridge, the U-boat officer gave an order, and his men stopped rowing. Holding water with their oars, they brought the boat to rest directly under Captain Willem. Mr. Stroud drew a thankful breath. The Germans apparently were taking Captain Willem at his word.

The U-boat officer raised his pistol and put the muzzle to Mr. Stroud's head, just above the right ear.

"Bring out Captain Traber and his crew," he cried up to Captain Willem, "or I vill shoot your sheef mate."

What little moisture was left in Mr. Stroud's throat dried up like a raindrop on a hot funnel. In a horrible flash of insight, Mr. Stroud saw what the U-boat commander had reasoned. It was that, while Captain Willem might not hesitate to sacrifice his own life, he might shrink from seeing his chief mate shot before his eyes.

AND the captain's slowness to give his answer seemed to confirm this. But in Mr. Stroud's anguished mind, there was no doubt what it would be. If Captain Willem was ready to blow up the ship while the boat lay alongside with him in it, he wasn't likely to yield merely to save him alone. This U-boat officer must be blind to that, or else he was stubbornly carrying out the orders of his commander.

Captain Willem at last spoke. "If you murder him, I'll blow you with the rest of us to the moon."

Mr. Stroud was filled with sudden hot gratitude for Captain Willem. The little Dutchman was putting up a fight for him. He was showing this German that he could be every bit as cold-blooded, more so, in fact.

The pistol, nevertheless, remained at Mr. Stroud's head. Mr. Stroud sat as if part of

the boat, only the faces of the sailors in it coming within range of his vision. All of them, those of the Germans too, were ghastly with suspense.

"I vill giff you von minute to shange your mind," the U-boat officer called up.

Mr. Stroud could no longer stifle his desperation. "He won't change his mind," he cried hoarsely. "I tell you he won't change his mind."

The German made no response. And no word came from Captain Willem. Not daring to move his head, Mr. Stroud could see him only with his mind's eye, holding the ends of the bared wires in readiness, equally ready to dodge back from a sudden pistol shot in his direction. The hard steel remained pressed against Mr. Stroud's feverish skin. The only sound was the lapping of water. Mr. Stroud became conscious of every one of his racing pulses. His stomach was a tight knot. He was going to die, all of them were going to die. Captain Willem wouldn't give in. This drilled German would carry out his orders and shoot. Captain Willem would touch the wires—

The pressure of the pistol against Mr. Stroud's head was suddenly removed. Mr. Stroud almost turned delirious with joy. The German officer was thrusting his weapon back into its holster. Whatever his orders had been, he had not dared to call the captain's hand.

"Get back on your oars," he snapped angrily at the *Almirante's* men.

The U-boat sailors turned over the oars to the ship's boat crew, who seized them with frenzied haste. The German officer turned the boat away from the ship. Captain Willem shouted:

"If you shoot him, I'll shoot Captain Traber."

Mr. Stroud overflowed with warmth for the little Dutchman. He was not neglecting the possibility that the Germans might still shoot him out of spite, when at a safe distance.

The U-boat officer scowled at Mr. Stroud. "He iss a madman. Only a madman vould vant to blow himself up for his sheef mate, but it iss lucky for you."

"And lucky for you that you had the sense to believe him," replied Mr. Stroud.

The boat returned to the submarine. The officer jumped aboard and reported to his commander. Cold rage mounted in the latter's face as he listened. He gazed in the direction of the *Almirante,* and for a moment or two he seemed undecided on his next stop. Finally he snapped an order, and the U-boat sailors climbed out of the boat. The commander stared down at Mr. Stroud, still seated in the stern.

"Tell Captain Willem I may meet him again," he fumed.

THE submarine then got under way, scarcely giving the lifeboat time to pull clear. Gathering speed, it headed toward the brightening sun. Mr. Stroud started back to the *Almirante.*

When he climbed aboard, he saw that Captain Willem had already disconnected the battery, and was coiling up the wire. Mr. Stroud had expected to find him exulting over his triumph. Instead, Captain Willem looked most unhappy.

"Mr. Stroud," he said, "I'm sorry for what you had to go through, though I must admit I feared that the Germans might try something like that. But it was torture for me too, not knowing if my bluff would stop him from shooting you."

Mr. Stroud looked at him blankly. "Then you didn't mean that?"

Captain Willem slowly shook his head. "My first thought was to save ship and cargo. They mean a blow at the Germans. I could not lose them simply to save your life.

"If the Germans had attempted to come aboard, that would have been different. Ship and cargo would have been theirs to destroy. So I would have blown them up myself, and all the Germans with them. I'd have done it with the thought that I was perhaps helping to inspire my countrymen."

If Mr. Stroud had nursed any hard feelings against the little Dutchman, they would have been softened by his next words. Gazing bitterly after the departing submarine, Captain Willem said:

"Before this war, I could no more have gone through with anything like that than I could have tortured my mother. That is what they have done to me. And to many others. But it is helping to cost them the war."

Ever Hear of Burlap Extradition? Black John Smith Said It Was the Way of the North . . . Well, One Way, Anyway

Conclusion

WAY OF THE NORTH

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

CHAPTER XXVII

BACK IN DAWSON

IT WAS late in the afternoon of the first day of December when Tom pulled up at the hotel in Dawson and greeted the clerk behind the desk with a smile. "Hello, Alex! Is Mr. Brandon in?"

"Well, by gosh, if it ain't Tom Jorden! How'd you make out in the lower country? An' say Tom—you've took off some weight, ain't you? Can't be they fed you very good, down there."

"Boiled fish," Tom grinned. "And if you've got boiled fish for supper tonight, I'll wreck this dump!"

"Got moose steak," the other laughed, shoving the register toward him, and dipping the pen. "You'd ort to stuck to the upper country. All the sourdoughs claim the lower country's petered out. Want yer same room? It's empty."

"Fine. I'll have time to wash up and shave before supper. How are the Brandons?"

"Oh, they're all right. I see him every day er so. Seen Miss Sue the other day on the street. She's lookin' fine."

"Saw her on the street! Aren't they living here?"

"No. Brandon, he bought a house. Second house past the log church—er mebbe the third." The man glanced at the clock on the wall. "It might be he's still at the office."

"Office! Cripes, has he got an office, too?"

"Sure—BRANDON & SHARPE. It's right on Front Street next door to the Tivoli. You'll see the sign. J. W.'s in, if you want to see him. Went upstairs jest before you come. He's in Room 23."

"Who's J. W.?"

"J. W. Sharpe. He's Brandon's pardner. Guess he come in after you pulled out."

"This Sharpe—is he a sourdough?"

"Hell, no! Come from Frisco. He's damn near froze most of the time. An' no wonder. Dresses like he was still in California."

"I'll go up to my room and drop around and call on the Brandons after supper. Send a boy up with some hot water."

In his room Tom bathed and shaved and changed into fresh clothing. So Sam Brandon had taken a partner. He was conscious of a slight sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. He wondered what this J. W. Sharpe was like. Was Sue still "office man" for the concern? What did she think of Sharpe?

The sinking sensation gave way to a pang of jealousy as he thought of Sue Brandon in close association all day long with her father's partner. And this partnership—how would it affect him? He had planned it all out over his campfires on the long snow trail. He'd go back to work for Brandon this winter, and in the spring he'd show him the big nuggets he and Porcupine Jack had taken out of the surface gravel and offer him a partnership in the Old Crow property. He, himself, would record the Discovery claim, and Brandon and Sue would record Numbers One Above and Below. Then, with Brandon's capital they could build not one scow, but four or five, and hire crews of woodchoppers and begin operations—work all the claims at once. In the meantime they would stake out a townsite at the mouth of the Old Crow. Why, the profit from the sale of lots in that townsite alone would be a Bonanza in itself! And then—when Sue found out that he had been right in throwing in with Porcupine Jack—that he had made good in the lower country—why, then——

It had been a wonderful dream—coarse gold rivaling anything the upper country could show—a big city at the mouth of the Old Crow—and Sue.

But how did this J. W. Sharpe fit into the scheme? Tom scowled into the mirror as he drew the comb through his thick mat of hair. "He fits like a glove," he growled, "like a glove would fit on a foot!" Somehow, he couldn't see offering Brandon & Sharpe a partnership. The Brandons—yes. But not Brandon & Sharpe.

Oh, well—he still had more than three thousand dollars. He could hire a couple of men and build some kind of a scow, and float wood enough to the claim to make a start. Then as he took out the gold, he could hire more men, and cut more wood, and take out more gold. It would take longer, that's all. There wouldn't be any stampede to the Old Crow for at least a year or two, so he'd have plenty of time to stake out his townsite. This way, he wouldn't have any partner—the gold he took out would be his own. But—Sue Brandon? He wouldn't have Sue, either. And—what did he want with the gold—if—if he didn't have Sue? "Damn J. W. Sharpe!" he muttered aloud. "I'm going down and record my location, and maybe at supper I'll get a chance to see what he looks like."

EARLY in the evening he knocked at the door of a neat three-room cabin to be greeted by Sue Brandon herself. Never, he thought, had she looked so beautiful—so altogether desirable, as she did now, standing there framed by the yellow lamplight.

"Tom Jorden!" she cried. And then, a peculiar, almost hysterical note in her voice, "Oh, Tom!"

Then she was crowded aside as Sam Brandon shouldered past her and thrust out his hand. "Back again, eh? By George, Tom, it's good to see you! Come on in and tell us all about your trip. Gave the lower country up as a bad job, eh? I told you you were wasting your time with that old fellow. I made inquiries about him among the sourdoughs after you'd gone. They all speak highly of him as a man. And here's a peculiar thing—a thing I don't just understand—the sourdoughs, to a man, insist that

the lower country is no good—yet the very thing they esteem this Porcupine Jack for is his undying faith in the lower country. It's inconsistent. It somehow don't jibe."

Tom nodded. "I think I understand," he said.

"But certainly your trip didn't accomplish anything, did it?"

Tom smiled. "I saw a lot of country. Filed a location, too. It's on a creek that flows into the Old Crow River—way up the Porcupine."

"Did Porcupine Jack come back with you, or did he stay down there?"

"Porcupine Jack is never coming back. He's dead." The two listened as Tom told of his trip, omitting to mention that Porcupine Jack was his own father—omitting, also, any mention of the fabulous wealth that he believed might lie concealed in the gravel of the creek delta, saying only that they found some color on the creek.

All during the recital Sue scarcely raised her eyes from her knitting. At its conclusion, Brandon cleared his throat.

"Well, now you've got that all out of your system, how about coming back with us?"

"That's what I came to see you about. But I hear you're a partnership, now. What will your partner say to the arrangement?"

"Oh, I've spoken to him about you. I knew you'd be back, sooner or later. He's just as anxious to take you on as I am. Fine chap, J. W. is. Shrewd business man, too. He came into the country the same as I did looking for investments. Got here soon after you left. Put up at the hotel and of course we got acquainted, and it wasn't long before we decided to pool our interests. We formed the partnership of Brandon & Sharpe. We put in fifty thousand apiece, and we're operating those two Fisher properties, and one other that we picked up on Goose Creek. Besides that we've got options on several other properties, and one other that we bought outright. There's plenty of work to be done right now—investigating these options, and getting the Goose Creek project into production. And the devil of it is, neither J. W. or I are quite up to this winter travelling. I'm going on sixty, and J. W.'s forty-five—both of us pretty old dogs to learn new tricks. We do go out when it's absolutely necessary—but we don't like it. Fact is, J. W. was going to pull out for Goose Creek tomorrow. It's a property he picked up cheap from a fellow who was pulling out for Stewart River. I warned him against buying any location outright before we'd had a chance to investigate it, but he went ahead on this one. Guess he's more of a gambler than I am. Said if it didn't come up to expectations he knew where he could unload it. Personally, I don't like the idea of 'unloading' a worthless property on some other fellow. When I told that to J. W. he laughed. 'Business is business, Sam,' he said. 'The doctrine of *caveat emptor* applies here the same as anywhere else.' He's all business, J. W. is. I think you'll like him. Fine looking chap, too."

Tom nodded, his eyes on the girl's profile. Apparently intent on her knitting, she had not once looked up during her father's recital. The lampshade threw a soft shadow upon her cheek and her auburn hair. In her lap the hands that plied her needles looked startlingly white. "Yes," he said, "I saw him this evening in the dining room. That is, I suppose it was he—store clothes, white collar, smooth shaven, dark hair turning iron gray about the temples. Looks more like an actor than a business man. The clerk told me about your partnership—told me Sharpe was living at the hotel—told me where to find you."

"Yes, we got tired of the hotel. Decided we wanted a place of our own—a real home. Nothing like a home of your own, my boy. You'll realize that sometime."

"Yes, I suppose I will." Sue Brandon's eyes met his in one fleeting glance then abruptly returned to her knitting. Was it a trick of the lamplight—or was there heightened color in her cheek? And did the fingers that plied the flashing needles falter ever so slightly.

Brandon was speaking again. "Sure you will. When the right girl comes along you'll know it. And in the meantime, Tom, we want you to feel free to drop in on us anytime you feel like it—don't we, Sue?"

The girl nodded. "Why, of course, Daddy. Tom knows that. Don't you, Tom?"

Again their eyes met, and again the girl's glance faltered and fell, as he replied, "Yes. Thanks a lot. I—I surely appreciate that." The words sounded somehow empty, banal, and all three felt the note of constraint in his voice.

As Tom rose to go, Brandon sought to gloss over the situation. He slapped Tom on the back, and his voice boomed heartily. "By gosh, Tom, you don't know how glad I am to have you back! Report at the office right after breakfast and meet J. W. I've got a hunch that you're going to be pretty damn busy from now on." He followed Tom to the door, but Sue remained seated.

"Good night, Tom," she called. "See you tomorrow."

CHAPTER XXVIII

TOM GOES TO WORK

IN THE office, next morning, Sharpe shook Tom's hand heartily as Brandon introduced them. "If you're half as good as Sam's been telling me you are, I'm certainly glad you're here," he laughed. "I haven't got the hang of this rough country travelling yet, and I don't mind saying that a little of it goes a long way. Sam's been predicting that you'd be back when you got that lower country bug out of your system, and he says you promised when you left that if your venture proved a failure, you'd come back to him."

"That's right," Tom agreed. "Well—I'm back, and ready to go to work. What's the first job to tackle?"

"Guess we better get a report on that Goose Creek property, hadn't we, J. W.?" Brandon said.

"That's right." Sharpe turned to Tom. "Know where Goose Creek is?"

"No. But it won't take me long to find out. Let's see the description of the property."

"Miss Brandon will hand you the papers this afternoon," Sharpe said. "And after you've rested up for a day or two, you'd better run out there and look it over."

"Rest up?"

"Why—yes. Sam tells me you just got in last evening from the lower country."

Tom laughed. "That's right. But I got all the rest I need last night. Give me the papers, and I'll hit out right now."

Brandon stepped to a neat desk in a corner of the little office, unlocked a drawer, and selected a paper which he handed to Tom. "Sue divides her time between the house and the office," he said. "She doesn't get down here till afternoon. Our business isn't so extensive yet as to require all of her time."

Tom read the description, and pocketed the paper. "Okay. I'll find out where Goose Creek is, and go out and have a look at the property. Has there been any work done on it?"

Sharpe nodded. "Oh, yes. According to Simeon Petty, the man from whom I bought it, he sank three shallow shafts on the property. He didn't locate it till spring, and during the summer he worked it, but could only go down a few feet until the seepage drove him out. He intended to work the location this winter, but in the meantime some friends of his persuaded him to accompany them to the Stewart River. So he sold the property to me."

"Was the stuff any good—as far down as he went?"

"Certainly. He told me that the gravel averaged fifty cents to the pan—and that practically on the surface. He seemed to have plenty of dust. Anyway, the property only stands us five thousand. If it doesn't come up to expectations, I know where I can unload it at a profit. I made the acquaintance of a man from Chicago, coming in on the boat, who was coming into the country to seek investments. Seems to have plenty of money—I understand he's buying right and left."

"Is there a shack on the property?" Tom asked.

"Well now, Petty didn't say. I assume, of course, that there must be a building of some kind. The man worked it all summer."

"Probably lived in a tent," Tom said. "It doesn't matter. I've got a good tent. I may be gone two or three weeks. I'll have to clean the snow out of those shafts and cut wood and burn in to get samples of the gravel out of the bottom."

"It seems to me," Brandon said, "that if the property is any good at all he wouldn't have sold it for five thousand."

Tom turned to Sharpe. "Is this Petty a chechako, or a sourdough?"

"He claimed to have been in the country for a couple of years. Mentioned living in Forty Mile, before coming here."

"The location may be all right," Tom said. "You never can tell about a sourdough. They're apt to go by hunches. This mining game gets into their blood. They're

just as likely as not to sell a going proposition for what they can get for it, if their hunch says they might find a better one on some other crick. We'll know more about it after I have a look at that gravel."

A few minutes later Tom stepped into the Tivoli Saloon to find Burr MacShane talking with Swiftwater Bill. He joined them at the bar, as the bartender shoved out another glass.

"Where's Porcupine?" MacShane grinned. "I thought you an' him would be damn near to the Arctic coast by now."

Tom poured his drink. "Porcupine is dead," he said, and proceeded to tell of the happenings at the Bluefish trading post.

Both sourdoughs expressed profound regret at the passing of Porcupine Jack. "He was a man—an' a damn good one," Swiftwater said. "Most of us claimed he was a damn fool fer pinnin' his faith on the lower country—an' mebbe he was. But jest the same, we don't know it all. Porcupine's hunch said his luck laid in the lower country—an' by God, he follered his hunch to the end. An' that's what I call a man. An' there ain't nothin' in the books that says that one of these days someone won't make a strike down there on the Porcupine that will make the dust we take out of this Klondike country look like chicken feed. An' who'd be the damn fools then? The hell of it is that Porcupine wouldn't be here to see it."

"Either of you fellows know where Goose Creek is?" Tom asked.

"Goose Crick? Yeah—let's see—Goose Crick—it runs into the Klondike about thirty miles up—runs in from the north."

MacShane nodded. "Yeah—ain't that the crick Tim O'Hara an' Mike Sullivan located?"

"That's right," Swiftwater said. "Doin' all right up there, too. It ain't only a short crick, an' they're right at the head of it."

"Know anyone named Simeon Petty?"

"Sim Petty! Yeah, I know him," Swiftwater said. "Used to work down around Forty Mile. Worked on the steamboats now an' then, too."

"Seen him in here a while back," MacShane said. "Claimed he'd sold a location to one of them chechako speculators fer five thousan'. He was all dressed up—an' lit up, too. Claimed he was goin' outside. But I was up to Whitehorse jest before the freeze-up, an' he was slingin' hash in a restaurant. His five thousan' was gone, an' so was most of his store clothes. That's as clost as he come to goin' outside. What do you want of Sim Petty?"

Tom shrugged. "I don't want him. I've got to go up to Goose Creek and look over a location he sold to J. W. Sharpe. I've gone back to work for Brandon. He's taken on a partner since I left."

"Yeah," Swiftwater Bill said dryly, "an' if you don't git busy, you'll find he's took on a son-in-law, too. This here Sharpe looks to me like a pretty slick article—like he'd be a damn sight better pickin' women than locations. He ain't overlookin' no bets when it comes to takin' that gal of Brandon's around to shows an' different doin's."

Tom downed his liquor and refilled his glass. He nodded slowly, his mind on the events of the previous evening—Sue Brandon's surprised, almost hysterical greeting as she opened the door. And later, the awkward constraint in the few words she had uttered as she busied herself with her knitting. "I guess you're right, Swiftwater," he said. "I guess I'd set my sights a little too high. She told me when I pulled out for the lower country that she'd never marry me."

Swiftwater Bill grinned. "Hell, there's a gal in this camp that's been tellin' me that all winter. But I'll bet, by God, she'll change her mind before spring! You talk like a damn fool. With the savvy you're takin' on, you ain't set yer sights too high fer no one. Look at Porcupine Jack—he never got what he was after, but by God he never quit tryin' fer it! You ain't the man I think you are if you lay back an' git yer time beat by any damn dude!"

CHAPTER XXIX

SHARPE MAKES A PROPOSITION

ONE evening, three weeks later, Tom stepped into the hotel dining room to be greeted by Sharpe, who beckoned him to his table. "Hello, Tom! Sit down. I've just put in my order. When did you get in?"

"Half an hour ago. And believe me, I'm hungry. Forced the trail a bit today. Didn't stop for noon lunch." A waitress paused beside his chair and he ordered a moose steak.

"Better make it a double order," Sharpe smiled. "This man's just in off the trail." When the girl had disappeared his glance met Tom's across the table. "Have you made out your report on the Goose Creek property?"

"There isn't much to report. The claim's no good, and never was."

"But the man, Petty, told me he averaged fifty cents to the pan, practically on the surface. Did you pan the gravel from the bottom of his shafts?"

Tom grinned. "Call 'em shafts, if you want to. I found three or four holes scooped in the gravel, none of 'em over a couple of feet deep. I panned samples from all over the place. Got about a ounce, or an ounce and a half of dust to show for a couple of weeks' work. I talked to Sullivan and O'Hara, a couple of partners who are working a Discovery claim on the upper end of the creek. They tell me that Petty never did take any dust out of his claim. All the dust he ever took off of Goose Creek was the dust they paid him for working for them."

"Why, the damned scoundrel! He misrepresented that claim to me! And if these men will swear on the witness stand that he never took any gold out of that property, I've got a clear case of fraud against him! You wait till he returns from that Stewart River trip, and I'll swear out a warrant for his arrest. Rascals of that stripe should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

"He never went to Stewart River. He got drunk and blew in part of your five thousand for some store clothes and hit for the outside. But he didn't get any farther than Whitehorse. He went broke there and got a job slinging hash in a restaurant. If you want to prosecute him the police can find him there, but I don't think you'd get very far with it. How are you going to prove that he misrepresented the property to you? Did anyone hear him tell you he took out fifty cents a pan? Even if you could prove he told you that, how could you prove he didn't take out fifty cents to the pan?"

"But didn't you just say that those two men on the creek told you he never took any dust out of that claim?"

"Sure they did. But they certainly weren't watching him every minute. They had work of their own to do. I know damn well he never took any fifty cents a pan—or even five cents out of that gravel—but I'd have the devil of a time proving it."

Sharpe drummed on the table with his fingertips. "Yes, I suppose yuh're right. But it's a damned shame that a rascal like that can go around perpetrating frauds, and nothing can be done about it. Oh well, I suppose we must all live and learn. If we can't make any money operating that property, at least we can get out without a loss. I know a man who will take it off our hands—the fellow I mentioned meeting on the boat. He seems to have plenty of money—and we might as well get some of it, as to let someone else get it. In fact," he added, with a knowing wink, "we might get out with a rather handsome profit—if we play our cards right."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, suppose, for instance, you were to slip up there and—er—judiciously distribute some dust in likely places—the bottom of those holes you mentioned, and maybe a few other likely spots. Then if I should offer the property to this prospective purchaser, and he should investigate it, and find this dust, he'd be inclined to pay a good price for the claim, wouldn't he?"

"You mean—salt it?"

"Well—as a matter of fact, you know, we wouldn't be doing anything out of the way. Because I happen to know that this party has pulled some pretty shrewd deals himself. You see, Tom, the damned rascal would try to beat us out—would offer us a mere pittance of what he believed the property was worth when he found that dust on it. It would serve the scoundrel jolly well right."

"What would Sam Brandon say to a deal of that kind? You and he are partners. He'd have to be a party to it."

"Certainly we're partners. But that doesn't mean that Sam would necessarily have to be informed of every little detail of every deal we make. What Sam don't know won't hurt him any. He was mighty skeptical about that deal right from the first. In fact, I put it over without consulting him. He'll be tickled to death to find we made a profit on it." The man paused, cleared his throat, and leaning forward, lowered his voice. "And here's another thing, Tom. You play along with me now and then—and you won't lose by it. There may be cases like the present,

where we could put over something of which Sam might not approve. Sam's a good business man all right. But he's a bit old-fashioned. He doesn't seem to realize that modern business is more or less a case of dog eat dog—and the devil take the hindermost. If you don't beat the other fellow, he's sure as hell going to beat you. The smart man, these days, is the man who comes out of a deal with the money. As I say, you play in with me, and I'll slip you money now and then over and above your salary—money out of my own pocket. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

"Well—it seems——"

"Of course it does! By the way—does Sam know you're back?"

"No. No one does except you. I didn't even see the hotel clerk when I came in."

"Fine—splendid! We'll take care that he doesn't see you when you go out, either. I'll attract his attention while you slip up to my room after supper, and I'll give you the dust. Then you can slip out, and no one will be the wiser."

"You mean the dust to salt the claim with?"

"Certainly."

"Where did you get it?"

"Get what?"

"Why—this dust."

"Where did I get it? What difference does that make?"

"It might make a hell of a lot of difference. For instance, you couldn't salt a Bonanza claim with dust taken from Hunker. And you couldn't salt any of these upriver claims with dust from Forty Mile."

"Why not? Dust is dust, isn't it? It's all gold."

"Yes, it's all gold. But all dust isn't alike, Dust from one creek may be altogether different from dust from another creek—different in color, and shape, and in the size of the grains."

"Do you mean to tell me that just by looking at a sample of dust you can tell where it came from?"

"I know the difference in dust from some of the cricks. But there are plenty of men right here in Dawson that know a lot more about dust than I do."

"But this man I have in mind as a prospective purchaser is not one of them. He came into the country the same time I did. And he certainly knows nothing of all this."

TOM shrugged. "Maybe not. But if he hired a sourdough to work the claim, he'd damn well know it. Even if he worked it with green hands, he'd get suspicious when the gravel suddenly went lean after they'd taken the salt out of it. Then if he'd have you arrested, it wouldn't take a jury of sourdoughs five minutes to convict you of fraud."

Sharpe scowled. "The only way then would be to obtain some dust from Goose Creek. I believe you mentioned that there are other claims on the creek."

"Only one. It's a short creek, and Sullivan and O'Hara have the only other claim on it. The whole creek was staked after they made their strike. But theirs was the only location that was any good."

Sharpe was silent for several moments. "These men—Sullivan and O'Hara—if we should obtain some dust from them—could they—er—be trusted to say nothing about the transaction—that is, of course, if we should make it worth their while?"

Tom shook his head. "I don't think so. They both seem to be good square guys."

Sharpe frowned. "I want you to understand that I would not for a moment consider being a party to any transaction that savored of underhandedness, were it not for the fact that I have every reason to believe that the man I have in mind as a purchaser would not hesitate to take advantage of me, if he got the chance. On second thought, I'll ask you to forget the whole thing. If I can unload this property for what I paid for it, well and good. If not we'll have to take the loss.

"I believe that Sam feels the same way—that we shouldn't be mixed up in any shady transaction."

"I know he does!" Tom agreed.

"To be sure. So I'm asking you to say nothing to Sam or to Sue about my suggestion of—er, salting this property. They might not understand that the plan was conceived only because I believe the man with whom I was to deal is thoroughly unscrupulous. I tell you there ought to be some way to protect innocent purchasers from the machinations of damned rascals like him and that Simeon Petty! It's an outrage!"

CHAPTER XXX

ON INDIAN RIVER

DURING the following two months Tom spent little time in Dawson. He visited the properties on Hunker and Ophir to find the work progressing satisfactorily, and investigated several other locations that were offered for sale on various creeks. He also bought a portable saw mill and set it up on a feeder to Bonanza, on one of the purchases he had approved, and set a crew to work getting out lumber for a flume. The mill also did more than enough custom sawing to pay for itself during the first sixty days of operation.

During this time he saw little of Sue Brandon. Their contacts in the office, generally with either Sharpe or Brandon present, were purely matters of business. Tom realizing that the girl's attitude toward him had changed completely, ascribed it to her anger at his leaving for the venture into the lower country.

Each was keenly aware of the constrained attitude of the other, but neither one, either by word or act, did anything to relieve the situation.

When in town Tom moved about, attending the occasional amateur performances and other activities, generally in company with some of the sourdoughs, and always he saw Sue in company with Sharpe. At the hotel she was frequently his guest at supper. Despite the fact that Sharpe seemed to outdo himself to show her a good time, Tom sensed that she was unhappy.

Then one afternoon in early March when he returned from the creeks to find her alone in the office, he addressed her bluntly—almost gruffly.

"You don't have to hate me, Sue—just because you prefer going around with J. W." At her desk the girl seemed to wince at the words. She did not answer, but seemed to bend lower over the location paper she was copying. Tom continued. "When I went away with Porcupine Jack, I knew you were angry. But I thought you'd get over it. I told you that when I came back you'd change your mind and marry me. I see that I was wrong. But—I still think of all the things we went through together—the camp at Lake Lindemann—the building of the boat—and the long days and evenings on the river—and I——"

"Don't!" The word jerked hysterically from between the girl's lips. Then words poured forth in a torrent. "I think of those times, too. And if you hadn't gone away—everything would be—different. But you did go. And then *he* came. We met him at the hotel. He was different from the others—the sourdoughs—and the other chechakos. We became well acquainted, and he began taking me around. I was glad to go with him. I—I was still angry with you. Then he and daddy went into partnership. And—and then—he asked me to marry him and I accepted. Daddy approved the match because he thinks J. W. is a good business man."

Tom's question came brutally direct. "Do you love him?"

"He has plenty of money—and he certainly tries to make me have a good time."

"Do you love him?"

THE girl's eyes flashed angrily. "How dare you ask me that, Tom Jorden! You would never take me to a show—even when I asked you to. You, who from the minute we hit Dawson began to avoid me—would never even spend an evening with me! When you weren't out on the creeks, you spent your time in the Tivoli Saloon. And—you—preferred the sourdoughs' company to mine! What right have you to ask me who I love?"

Astounded at the vehemence of the girl's attack, Tom found himself at a loss for words. "Why—Sue—I never avoided you. I—I'd have liked nothing in the world better than being with you every minute. But your dad was paying me to work for him. He was paying me to learn the business of mining. And where else could I learn it but out on the creeks? He was paying me to get those properties he bought into production. And I couldn't do that by taking you to shows—nor by spending my evenings with you—much as I'd have liked to. And as for the time I spent in the Tivoli—it was spent there because that's where the sourdoughs were, the men from whom I had to learn. You know that, Sue. You know that your dad was surprised when the sourdoughs told him I was competent to handle those properties. And you know that I'd learned enough before I went away to save him from being gypped by Jim Devine. And I learned a lot

on that trip with Porcupine Jack—a lot that I've never told you."

"Oh, you've learned, all right," the girl said bitterly. "The sourdoughs all say you're a good man. But—what good is it all?" Her voice broke sharply. "You've learned—but if you loved me—as you told me you did when—when you went away—*you've paid a hell of a price* for your learning!"

"Listen, Sue! It's not too late. You can break off your engagement. You're not married to Sharpe."

"A promise is a promise. I'll not break off my engagement. I've given my word—and I'll keep it."

The door opened abruptly and J. W. Sharpe stepped into the office, his glance shifting from the flushed face of the girl to Tom. He drew a paper from his pocket. "Do you know where Indian River is?" he asked.

"Sure, I do."

"Well, I ran onto a proposition up there that looks good on the face of it. Two partners have been working a Discovery claim up there all winter, and have decided to split up. The location is on a feeder that runs into Indian River about twenty miles back from the Yukon. These young fellows are newcomers—chechakos, I believe the term is—who came into the country last fall. They are here in Dawson at the moment. I ran across one of them in the hotel, and in the course of a casual conversation, he told me his troubles. It seems that the two met at Whitehorse on the way in, and decided to throw in together. They located this property, put up a shack, and have been working it throughout the winter. At first everything went well. They worked hard, their dump grew, and regular test pannings showed that the proposition was paying much better than wages. But gradually they began to quarrel. Only occasionally at first, then with increasing frequency, until now they are scarcely speaking. As far as I can make out neither has accused the other of any serious fault."

TOM nodded. "Just got on each other's nerves, eh? It's not an uncommon situation. I've heard the sourdoughs tell about plenty of cases just like it. Two men go out in the fall the best of pals, and by spring each would gladly kill the other. It even happens sometimes among sourdoughs. But mostly it's the chechakos."

"Just so. They stood it as long as they could without resorting to actual violence, then decided to split up. So they are here now, trying to sell the property. Several of the sourdoughs are interested, and have promised to look the location over right after the break-up. But the partners want to sell, now. They don't want to go back and work together. And they don't want to hang around Dawson idle until after the break-up. They each want to strike out on their own as soon as the break-up comes. Our—er—rather unfortunate experience with the Goose Creek property has taught me not to buy a pig in a poke, as the saying is. We were lucky to get out of that one with our money back. I sold it to the fellow I met on the boat for five thousand." He paused and smiled at Sue, whose slight change of expression indicated disapproval. "Oh, I know Sam didn't approve of the deal—wanted to take the loss and forget the matter. But I'm more practical. If I was a bit optimistic in my representation of the property, that's only natural. I made no definite guarantees—nothing that he could use as the basis of a lawsuit. If he don't like the property he can resell it. After all—business is business." The girl made no answer, and Sharpe turned to Tom. "And so, I want you to run out there and examine the property. Here's the description. I copied it from the recorder's book. You'll find a shack there and, according to these boys, plenty of grub. So you can travel light. You know more about these matters than I do—but I'd suggest that in addition to examining the bottom of their shaft, you also make test pannings from various parts of their dump. These lads seem honest enough—but you never can tell. Despite their honest appearance they might be rascals at heart—might try to pull off an underhanded trick of some kind."

Tom grinned. "Like salting the shaft or the dump, eh?"

Sharpe frowned. "Exactly," he snapped. "When can you start?"

"Right now." Tom answered. "I can find out all we need to know about it in ten days or two weeks. So long, I'm off."

Tom spent ten days at the Indian River property. He worked long hours tending the fires that thawed out the gravel, mak-

ing test pannings, and exploring the little feeder. Dead tired, he would crawl into his blankets immediately after supper, and before sleep came, would lie there staring up into the dark. Life was a hell of a thing. He wondered vaguely whether anyone's life ever worked out the way he wanted it to. There was Sue Brandon—the only girl in the world he had ever cared for. It seemed to him, as he lay there, that he could recall every look, every touch of her hand, almost every word she had uttered since the first time he had seen her standing at the rail of the boat, her hair blowing across her face, and her skirts whipping about her knees, to the day in the little office when she told him she was going to marry J. W. Sharpe. He knew now that he loved her more than he could ever love any other woman. And he sensed that deep down in her heart she loved him. But—where had he failed? Why was it that two people who were made for each other from the first, must live their lives apart, instead of together.

Maybe if he had told her about himself—about the utter sorrow, and aloneness, and the bitterness of his life, she would have understood—would have evaluated him at his worth—would neither have pitied, nor have scorned. But—he had been afraid to risk it—suppose she hadn't understood? He was happy with her—happy for the first time in his whole life. He hadn't dared to tell her—had been content just to drift on, and on together—as they had drifted together down the Yukon. Was it a mistake—his decision to throw in with Porcupine Jack?

He knew she had been angry at that decision. But he thought she would soon get over it. And—no, it couldn't have been wrong. If he had not made that trip into the lower country, he would never have found his father. But—on the other hand, if they had not made that trip, his father would still be alive. Round and round his reasoning took him—to decide nothing, to end nowhere. *Life is a hell of a mess!* Oh, well—Sue could marry J. W. She wouldn't be happy. Eventually she would find out that under the suave exterior he was a crook at heart. She didn't love him—never could love him. But she'd stick by her bargain. And he? He would go back to the Porcupine country. And there on the Old Crow he'd take out the gold—maybe millions. But—without Sue, what did he want with the gold? Anyway you look at it—*life is a hell of a mess!*

The sourdoughs seemed to have a good time—and most of them weren't married. But maybe they'd never been in love. Or maybe they had been a long time ago—so long ago that they'd had time to forget. He wondered how long it would be before he could forget Sue Brandon. It wouldn't be long, now, till the break-up would come. He'd quit his job and go back to the lower country. He liked Sam Brandon. But he hated J. W. Sooner or later Sam would find out what sort of a man J. W. was—but it would be too late, then, because he'd be his son-in-law as well as his partner.

THAT location on the Old Crow—he'd go back there and work it this coming summer—work it with a pick and shovel—take out enough gold so he could hire a crew of wood cutters. Then he'd build the scows, as he and his father had planned to do, and haul in wood, and put other crews to work in the shafts—and by another year he'd be a real sourdough, like Bettles, and Swiftwater Bill, and Burr MacShane, and Moosehide Charlie. And every once in a while he'd come up to Dawson and the chechakos would nudge each other and say, "There's Tom Jorden, the guy that struck it lucky down in the lower country." And Sue would see him, too. He'd meet her on the street, and tip his hat, and say "Good evening, Mrs. Sharpe." And then he'd go on into the Tivoli and mix with the sourdoughs, and drink, and play stud. That's what he wanted gold for—to drink and play stud! He'd bet 'em high—five, ten thousand on the turn of a card! He wished he could drink whiskey like Bettles. But after the first drink or two, whiskey made him sick. Oh, well—he was young, yet. Maybe he could learn.

On the last evening he was to spend in the shack, he finished supper, washed his dishes, and rummaged in his duffel bag for his notebook.

Unlike the Goose Creek proposition, this property showed a real promise. Pannings from the shaft, and from all parts of the dump showed uniform values, that would undoubtedly increase as the shaft neared

bedrock. As he dumped the contents of the bag onto the floor in search of the notebook, the string that bound his father's packet of old letters broke, scattering them about, and from an envelope slipped the letter from Stowe, the banker. Picking it up, he was about to return it to the envelope when his eyes suddenly widened, and he knelt there amid the litter of socks, shirts, and envelopes and stared at the handwriting.

Rising to his feet, he carried the letter to the table, drew Sharpe's copy of the location from his pocket, spread the two papers side by side, drew the lamp closer, and for a long time he sat staring at the two sheets —the creased one with its faded ink, and the freshly penned description. Word by word —letter by letter, he studied the two scripts. *The handwriting was identical!*

"Good God!" he breathed, as the full force of the discovery burned into his brain. "J. W. Sharpe is Joel W. Stowe! That tramp didn't murder Stowe, Stowe murdered the tramp! He murdered him, and changed clothing with him. They must have been about of a size. Then he cut off his head and buried it where it was never found, and laid the body on the rail where that freight train mutilated it beyond recognition. Then he made his way on foot to West Union. It was Stowe who was seen climbing a westbound freight there, that night—not the tramp. And he was carrying Mr. Kay's twenty-thousand dollars with him."

UNTIL far into the night, he sat there, lips tight-pressed, eyes raising from the two papers spread before him to stare at the blank wall of the shack—shifting back to the papers again. So this was the man—this J. W. Sharpe, his employer, Sam Brandon's partner, the man who was to marry Sue Brandon —this was the man who had ruined his father's life. And had caused him all the misery he had ever known—had changed his boyhood from a time of happy memories to a hell of doubt, and suspicion, and hatred —and now was about to marry the only girl he had ever loved.

It was long past midnight when he placed the two sheets of paper in his pocket, blew out the light, and slipped into bed. "Maybe, things *do* work out," he breathed into the dark. "Maybe life isn't such a hell of a mess, after all."

CHAPTER XXXI

J. W. VISITS THE CLAIM

RETURNING to Dawson he found both J. W. and Sam Brandon in the office. Sharpe eyed him expectantly. "Well—what did you find? Sam, here, is rather skeptical about the proposition. Afraid it'll turn out to be another Goose Creek. But why he should worry is more than I can see—we got our money back on that one, even if we didn't show a profit."

Brandon frowned. "As I told you before, J. W., I'd rather have taken a loss on that property than to have foisted it off on someone else, knowing it was worthless. Legitimate trading in unknown values is perfectly honorable, if a man cares to take the chance. But deliberately selling a worthless property, is something else again. That resale was none of my doing."

Sharpe laughed. "You'll have to get rid of some of your old-fashioned notions, Sam. Get the other fellow before he gets you, is my motto. And, if I do say it myself, I haven't done so badly." He turned to Tom. "What do you think of this Indian River proposition?"

Drawing a paper from his pocket, Tom handed it to Sharpe. "There's the figures on thirty-five test pannings, taken from the shaft and the dump. As you can see they're not bad. In fact, I'd say they're very good. They run better even than the pannings from the Fisher properties, and they've showed a good profit. Of course, it depends on what you pay for the location. Take it all in all, I'd say it was a good buy—providing the price is right."

Sharpe scanned the figures. "Okay," he said. "I'll guarantee the price will be right. I'm going out and close the deal, right now. The break-up can't be so very far off, and I don't want any of those damn sourdoughs horning in ahead of us. By the way, how's travel on the river, now?"

"It couldn't be any better. I left the shack, twenty miles up the Indian at five this morning—and it's only four o'clock now, and I've put up the dogs and fed 'em. I made the run in a little over ten hours—it's about fifty miles."

"That's faster than I'd care to go. But do you know, I have an idea I'd like to have

a look at the property myself. Not that I don't trust your judgment in the matter. But I've hardly been out of Dawson since I got here. Believe it would do me good. Besides, I'd like to see for myself what this dog team travel is like."

Tom grinned. "It isn't like the pictures in the geography where an Eskimo woman and half a dozen kids, all dressed in furs, are sitting on a sled with the man standing up behind, cracking a long-lashed whip, and a long string of dogs are galloping over a level plain with the snow so hard-packed the sled runners don't leave a mark. In this country you don't ride the sled. You walk. And when the going is good, you run. And when it isn't, you push, and haul, and lift, and chop, and shovel."

"Nevertheless, I'm determined to go. But first I'm going to close this deal, so I can be sure it's our own property I'm examining, and not someone else's. Can we pull out in the morning?"

"Sure. We'd better figure on taking two days for it, though—soft as you probably are. There are plenty of cabins along the Yukon where we can put up for the night, if you don't mind sleeping on the floor."

JUST before supper Tom stopped in at headquarters and borrowed a book he had seen Corporal Downey reading when he had stopped in to report the happening on the Ophir trail. The book was *Finger Print Directories,* by an English anthropologist, Sir Francis Galton, who had written two previous volumes on the subject of identification by fingerprints. That night he read the book. The next morning he bought a fountain pen, filled, and pocketed it. And an hour later headed up the Yukon, accompanied by J. W. Sharpe.

It took two days to cover the distance that Tom had traveled in one. On the third day they inspected the property. "You see," Tom explained, as they ate supper that evening, "this is a short feeder, and when it comes time to sluice out the dump we're going to be up against it for water. There isn't enough drainage into this little creek to insure any supply after the first run-off when the snow melts."

"Can't we build a dam at the upper limit of the property and hold back the water till we want to use it?"

Tom shook his head. "It wouldn't work. We couldn't build the dam till the frost goes out of the ground, and by that time the snow water would be all gone. Besides that, it would be pretty expensive. I found a little lake just over the rim. I can take half a dozen men, and with a little powder, some timbers, and lumber, we can run a flume down here with a gate at the head of it, and control all the water we want."

"Good idea!" Sharpe exclaimed. "Splendid! By Jove, Tom, I don't know what we'd do without you! I suppose we'll have to move the lumber and timbers up from Dawson."

"No. We can get out the timbers right here. And there's a portable mill only a few miles above here. It won't cost much to get the stuff down." Stepping to his mackinaw which hung from a peg driven into the wall, he produced his notebook, and fountain pen, taking care to shake a few drops of ink into the cap and thus smear the penholder. Handing the book and pen to Sharpe, he said, "Just write an order for the lumber and I'll slip up there with it as soon as the moon comes up, so they can be getting it out. I'll be back in two or three hours, and in the morning we can hit for Dawson, and I'll pick up a crew, and what powder and supplies we'll need and get busy on the flume."

Sharpe wrote the order, picked up the paper, and handed it to Tom, "Damn fountain pens!" he groused, scowling at his ink-stained fingers. "Never saw one yet that wouldn't leak. You spoke of hitting for Dawson in the morning. D'you know, I believe I'll stick around here, for a while at least. I'm not as young as you are, and I didn't realize I'd get as soft as I have. I've put in a pretty tough three days, and a rest will do me good. Besides that, I'm interested in seeing how you go at things. Fact is, I know next to nothing about the practical side of mining. And seeing that I've invested every cent I've got with Brandon I feel that I ought to know something about how the money's being used."

"That's a good idea," Tom agreed. "But how will you make out here alone? It'll probably take me several days to line up a crew and get back here."

"Don't worry about me. There's plenty of food here, I'll get along all right."

"Okay. I won't bother to come back to the shack, then. I'll hit from the mill straight on to Dawson. I can be there before noon tomorrow, if it don't cloud up. The quicker we get to work on that flume, the better."

Sharpe smiled. "It's great to be young. I wish I had your energy and your endurance. No wonder Sam Brandon said you're a good man!"

CHAPTER XXXII

BLACK JOHN TAKES A HAND

SHORTLY after noon on the following day, Tom Jorden stepped into the little office at detachment headquarters of the Northwest Mounted Police to find Corporal Downey in conversation with a huge black-bearded man who, with his chair tilted against the wall and his heels on Downey's desk, was puffing at a briar pipe and blowing a cloud of gray smoke ceilingward.

"Hello, Tom!" the officer greeted. "Come in an' sit down. I want you to meet a friend of mine, John Smith from Halfaday Crick—more or less favorably known as Black John."

Tom smiled, and advancing to the big man offered his hand. "I've heard of you. But—I—I didn't know you were a friend of Corporal Downey."

Black John returned the smile. "No? Why not?"

"Well—the fact is, the man who spoke of you told me you were an—an outlaw."

The smile behind the black beard widened. "Yeah, that's what the talk is. I'll bet even Downey, here, has heard rumors to that effect. But who was this character-defamin' scoundrel?"

"Porcupine Jack. He said he thought I'd like you, and that you would probably like me."

"Porcupine Jack, eh? By God, there was a man! Him an' old man Minook was the only two sourdoughs in the Yukon that still hung onto their faith in the lower country. I shore was sorry to hear he'd passed on. Got stabbed by some Siwash up on the Porcupine, they tell me."

Tom nodded. "That's right. He got stabbed because he stepped in front of the knife that was aimed at me."

"Well, I'll be damned! Then you must be the young fella that I've be'n hearin' about. Got yer boat back from a couple of thieves on Lindemann, an' split a hold-up's head with a belt ax on the Ophir trail, and throw'd in with Porcupine, an' shot that damn Cronk, up on the Bluefish. Downey run him out of here a year er so ago, an' I heard he was hittin' fer Halfaday. I hit out an' overtook the cock-eyed coot at the mouth of the White. Don't jes rec'lect at the moment what it was I told him, but it was prob'ly somethin' that changed his mind, 'cause the next I heard of him he was over in Alaska. I s'pose I'd ort to hung him right there—but somehow, it didn't seem ethical. You done humanity a service when you shot him, son. Fer a chechako you ain't doin' so bad. How'd you an' Porcupine make out, down there?"

"We found something that looks good on the Old Crow. I filed a Discovery location when I got back."

"If it works out, it's shore too bad Porcupine couldn't live to git in on it. It must of be'n tough on you, son—seein' him go like he did."

Tom nodded. "Yes," he said, "it was tough. Porcupine Jack was my dad."

"Yer dad!" Black John cried. "Well, no wonder you've got guts! I never even know'd Porcupine was married!"

"My mother died before I was old enough to remember her. And when I was five, dad had to skip out on account of a crime—a murder he never committed. That's what I came to see Corporal Downey about. I've found the murderer. He's right here on the Yukon."

Both men stared at the speaker in astonishment. "You mean," Downey asked, "that you've located a man who committed a murder back in the States when you was only five years old? That must be fifteen, sixteen years ago!"

"Sixteen years, now."

Black John's shrewd gray eyes were fixed on the younger man's face. "Could you prove it, son?" he asked.

"That's what I want Corporal Downey to decide. That's what I came to see him about. It's quite a long story. It might bore you."

"If the details becomes borin' I can stroll over to the Tivoli an' h'ist a couple of drinks.

I ain't a policeman. I ain't paid to listen. Go ahead."

STARTING at the beginning, Tom told the story, much as he had recounted it to Porcupine Jack beside the campfire on the Porcupine. He eyed Downey. "I've already reported to you what happened there on the Bluefish. But the rest of it—what has happened since I got back to Dawson, you don't know."

"Yes, yes—go ahead!" Downey exclaimed.

"Shore, git on with it!" Black John seconded. "Cripes, don't be like one of these here damn writers that busts off a story right in the interestin' part, so you've got to buy the next magazine to find out how it come out!"

"Well, when I got back, and struck Sam Brandon for my job as I promised him I would, I found he'd taken a partner. A man named J. W. Sharpe."

Downey nodded. "Yeah, I know him—lives at the hotel."

"That's right. They took me on, and it wasn't long before I found out that Sharpe is a damn crook. He wanted me to salt a proposition up on Goose Creek, that a fellow by the name of Sim Petty stuck him with. I scairt him out of that by telling him that in case the purchaser suspected a fraud any of the sourdoughs that might be called in to testify, could tell the jury whether the dust he put into the gravel came from that creek, or not.

"Then a couple of weeks ago, he sent me up to look over a property on Indian River. He handed me the description he had copied from the book in the recorder's office. While I was up there I dumped the stuff out of my duffel bag onto the floor of the shack to find my notebook and a packet of old letters rolled out. They were letters that my dad carried around with him all these years—letters that my mother had written him when he'd be away on business trips. I read them all, that night dad died, up on the Bluefish. Inclosed in one of these letters was one from the local banker stating that a loan dad had evidently applied for had been approved by the board of directors.

"Well, just by chance, this letter slipped from its envelope, and as I picked it up to return it, something about the handwriting attracted my attention. There seemed something peculiar about it—something strangely familiar. I had read this letter up there on the Bluefish, along with the others—but it wasn't that—it seemed that I had seen that writing recently. Then I remembered. I took the description memo that J. W. had handed me out of my pocket, and laid the two papers side by side on the table. The handwriting was identical. The man that wrote that letter is the man who copied that description off the recorder's book!"

"Good God!" Downey exclaimed. "Are you sure? You mean that J. W. Sharpe is the banker yer dad was suspected of murderin' back there in Minnesota, sixteen years ago?"

"That's right. And I'm sure. I studied those two papers for a long time, comparing the writing, letter by letter. Then it dawned on me that I'd been wrong all these years. I knew my dad never murdered Stowe, and old Doctor Leroy knew it—but we figured that the tramp had murdered him and made off with Mr. Kay's twenty thousand. But it wasn't the tramp who murdered Stowe—Stowe murdered the tramp!"

Corporal Downey's brows puckered in a frown. Black John refilled his pipe. After several moments of silence, the officer spoke. "I've heard of crimes bein' solved by identifyin' a person's handwritin', but the identifyin' was done by experts—men that makes a special study of it. It's quite a science, from what I've read. Mind you—I'm not sayin' you're wrong. But jest so we don't go off half-cocked, let's stop an' think it over. Yer shore you ain't sort of prejudiced against this J. W. Sharpe to start out with?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I know what Sam Brandon thinks of you, an' it's reasonable to suppose you think the same of him. Now when you come back from the lower country an' find out he's taken in a partner, an' you find this partner ain't exactly on the up-and-up, couldn't it be you'd be lookin' fer a chanct to get somethin' on him—fearin' that, bein' crooked, he might lay fer a chanct to swindle Brandon out of his money?"

Tom nodded. "That's probably true. I have worried some about that very thing. But I certainly wouldn't accuse a man of a murder unless—"

"No! No! I know you wouldn't do that.

But there's another angle, too. Accordin' to Moosehide an' Jack Gorman, you an' Miss Brandon was mighty good pals on the way in. They both figured you two would prob'ly get hitched. But sence this J. W. Sharpe has be'n here, I've noticed that she's going around with him to all the doin's that's pulled off. Now when you come back an' see how things is, ain't it reasonable to believe that you wouldn't have no particular love fer this Sharpe? That you might have a damn good reason fer wantin' to get him out of the picture?"

TOM'S face had gone a shade paler. "Sue Brandon didn't want me to go to the lower country," he said in a low, toneless voice. "And when I stuck to the plan, she told me she would never marry me. The other day she told me she had promised to marry J. W. But even so, I certainly wouldn't accuse him of a crime, if I didn't believe he was guilty."

"I know you wouldn't, Tom. But ain't it a fact that you could convince yerself of his guilt, on a damn sight less evidence than that you'd convince yerself of—say Sam Brandon's guilt, er Moosehide Charlie's?"

"Yes, I suppose that's true. But I'm not deciding on his guilt. That's up to you. And I'm not relying altogether on the handwriting, either. When I was studying those two papers, I noticed that there was a distinct thumb print on that old letter. The penholder had evidently become fouled with ink, and when he picked up the letter to fold it, he left his thumb print on the paper. That's why I borrowed that book of Galton's on fingerprint identification. I read that book—and then I went out and bought a fountain pen. Up in the shack the other night, I told J. W. I needed an order from him for some flume lumber, and handed him my notebook and pen—after taking care that the penholder was smeared with ink. He wrote the order, cussed the leaky pen, and handed me the paper—with a swell thumb print on it. You've read Galton's book. You've got a magnifying glass. Let's compare those prints—and you can compare the writing. The glass ought to help with that, too."

The front legs of Black John's chair hit the floor with a thud as he leaned eagerly forward. "By God, Downey, there's a chechako that's be'n usin' his head! What the hell you waitin' fer! Git out that glass, an' let's git to work! When we git them papers spread out on the desk we ort to find some meat a man kin sink his teeth into!"

For a good half hour the three bent over the papers, studying both the handwriting and the thumbprints, passing the glass back and forth one to the other. Finally Black John pushed back his chair.

"There ain't a chanct in the world that this here J. W. Sharpe an' Joel Stowe ain't the same person," he opined. "It was a damn smart trick he pulled, back there. Knowin' his wheat-gamblin' had wrecked his bank, he know'd there wasn't nothin' ahead of him but a damn good stiff prison stretch. He puts Jorden off, tellin' him he'll pay them checks in the mornin'. He's got the twenty thousan' in cash he got off'n the elevator man. So he knocks off the hobo, switches clothes with the body, cuts off the head an' buries it, an' lays the body on the tracks fer further mutilation, then walks the track to the next town, an' hops a freight fer the West."

"Looks like a damn risky play," Downey said, "committin' a murder."

"Not when you figger he didn't have nothin' to lose except, mebbe, a little longer prison stretch. With no witness to the murder, they could never have made a first degree charge stick. He could have claimed he killed that bum in self-defense—that the hobo found out he had the money on him, an' made a play for it. Then he got scairt at what he'd done, an' skipped out. A good lawyer kin make a jury believe anything."

"But even hidin' the head, an' switchin' clothes," Downey said, "it looks like he took a hell of a chanct of someone knowin' it wasn't his body they picked up off the track."

"Not sech a hell of a chanct when you come to figger he wasn't married. Tom says he was batchin' it over the bank. His wife could prob'ly have spotted the fraud—but he didn't have none. As fer as the rest of the folks in town went, that suit of clothes on the body was enough identification fer them. There wouldn't no one be particularly interested—'specially with most of the folks in town figgerin' he'd got what was comin' to him fer lootin' the bank."

"I guess that's right," Downey admitted.

"The matter of age seems to check all right. Tom mentioned him as a 'young' banker—that was sixteen years ago. An' this Sharpe looks like a man somewheres between forty-five an' fifty, now."

"It was a kind of dumb trick not to change his initials when he changed his name," Tom said. "J. W. S. seems a kind of a give-away."

"That's right," Downey agreed, "but it's surprisin' how many crooks do jest that. I've noticed it, an' I've heard other policemen say the same thing."

"Black John grinned. "Is that so, Downey? By God now, that's an interestin' bit of lore! I must remember that—jest in case, fer some onknown reason I might want to make use of it, sometimes. J. S. is my initials. I shore as hell won't never change my name to—say, Joshuay Snood!" He turned to Tom. "Do you happen to know the amount of this here Sharpe's investment in the Brandon pardnership?" he asked.

"Yes, Brandon told me they'd put in fifty thousand dollars, apiece."

Drawing a pad toward him, the big man figured for several minutes. "The sum seems equitable," he announced, returning the pencil to the desk.

"What do you mean?" Downey asked.

"Meanin' that, accordin' to what Tom told us, Porcupine Jack lost in that bank failure, includin' the hardware store loss, it was twenty thousan' dollars. An' accordin' to my figgers, this sum, with accrued compound interest would amount to fifty-one thousan', seven hundred an' forty-eight dollars an' ninety-four cents."

"But listen, John—I'm afraid there's no use even arrestin' Sharpe at this late date. In the first place, any embezzlement charges that might have be'n laid against him, either by the defunct bank, or the grain company whose money he stole, would most likely be outlawed by this time. The murder wouldn't outlaw—but after sixteen years, how the hell would they ever prove it? There was no witnesses. An' it's likely that most everyone that know'd anything about the facts would be either scattered, or dead. I couldn't arrest him without a request from the Minnesota authorities, an' even if I was to notify 'em I had the man, I'm doubtin' if they'd care to assume the expense of bringin' him back on such a slim chanct of gettin' a conviction. He'd fight extradition with everything he's got. An' on top of that, Tom would have no way of establishin' any claim he's got on Sharpe's money, in a civil suit, here. An' to get him into the jurisdiction of an American civil court would be next to impossible."

BLACK JOHN grinned. "That'll do, Downey. You don't need to set there an' think up reasons why the law can't help Tom git jestice. It would take from now till midnight. You've thought up four er five legal obstructions to jestice without half tryin', an' I'm willin' to take yer word fer it that there's plenty of more—an' to concede that Tom ain't got no legal redress, whatever. That's the way of the law. An' that's the reason I shun it. It obstructs more jestice than it dishes out. So, that bein' the case, we'll handle this here matter in the way of the North."

"The way of the North? What do you mean?"

"I mean we'll substitute common sense fer legal quibblin'—an' see how that works. Jest look at the facts, Downey—a bank got wrecked an' a lot of folks lost every damn cent they had because its president stole the funds an' gambled 'em away. A grain company got robbed of twenty thousan' dollars. I can't shed no tears over that loss. But a pore friendless hobo got murdered, an' the crime laid on an innocent man. We know the man who is guilty of all them pranks. We know he's livin' right here in Dawson, well-to-do an' respected, enjoyin' his freedom an, ondoubtless livin' off'n the fruits of them an' other crimes, whilst plannin' future ones—an' there ain't a damn thing the law kin do about it!"

"Guess that's so—if Tom's got his facts right," Downey admitted.

"He's got 'em right. You're no damn fool. You kin tell when a man's lyin', same as I kin. I know'd Porcupine Jack. He was a good square shooter. An' I know this lad's a square shooter, too."

Downey nodded. "I believe him. But there don't seem to be anything we can do about it."

"The hell there don't!" Black John turned to Tom. "If I was you, son," he said. "I'd jest make out a bill fer fifty-one thousan' seven hundred an' forty-eight dollars an' ninety-four cents, an' present it to

Sharpe, with a demand note fer the money."

"But—he'd never pay it!"

"Shore he would. He'd be glad to when you showed him that there letter he wrote yer pa. An' let him compare the handwritin' with that description he copied. An' then show him that lumber order he give you, an' explain to him about them thumbprints. You see, murder's a thing a man can't never git off his mind—onct he's committed one. Sharpe won't know they prob'ly couldn't convict him. He'd be afraid they could—seein' his identity has be'n established. Besides that, he prob'ly wouldn't know that them embezzlement charges has been outlawed. Bankers ain't necessarily up on criminal law—though God knows they ort to be. He would remember, though, that there'd be a hell of a lot of people back in that town who lost their money in that bank failure that would be mighty glad to testify agin him. An' plenty of 'em would fight fer the chanct to set on the jury that tried him. He wouldn't want to hear what a jury like that would have to say—by a damn sight."

Corporal Downey grinned. "But, John—doesn't that sort of savor of blackmail?"

"Blackmail! Why damn you, Downey! Are you hintin' that I'd connive at blackmail? Sense when has it be'n called blackmail to present an honest bill fer collection? Er has the law made that a criminal offense, too?" He turned to Tom. "Where's this here Stowe, er Sharpe, er whatever his name is, at now?"

"He's up in the shack on that Indian River property. Said he'd stick around there till I got back."

"That seems as good a place as any to dun him fer this little account—seein' it's past due. I'll go along with you—jest in case he mightn't onderstand about them thumbprints, *et cetry.* I'll be ready to start in an hour. Stop fer me at the hotel."

CHAPTER XXXIII

IN THE OFFICE

WHEN the office door closed behind the big man, Tom glanced at Downey. "Who is this Black John Smith, anyway? As I said, my dad mentioned him up there on the Porcupine. But he said he was considered an outlaw. At that, he said he was about the only man in the North who goes out of his way to straighten out other folks' troubles for 'em."

The officer nodded. "I guess Porcupine Jack was about right, at that. Black John is—well, he's Black John. It's said that he's wanted in Alaska—but as far as I know no U. S. marshal has ever tried to take him back there. At least," he added with a grin, "none has ever succeeded in taking him back. An' we certainly have never had any request to hold him for the American authorities. He's a sort of a law unto himself. Besides straightening out a lot of folks' troubles for 'em, as Porcupine said, he also manages to deal out a pretty level-headed brand of justice, up there on Halfaday Crick. He's got a mighty effective mode of procedure—and mighty conclusive, too. When someone arrives on Halfaday that Black John figures rates a hangin', he simply calls a miners' meetin' an' hangs him."

"Hangs 'em! Isn't that a pretty high-handed procedure? How does he know they're guilty of murder?"

Downey shrugged. "Murder — hell! That's only one of the things he hangs 'em for. A man can get hung on Halfaday for anything Black John considers hangable. I've known of a lot of hangin's up there—but I've got to hear of the first one yet that was a miscarriage of justice. Damned if I know how he knows they ort to be hung—but he does. An' mostly they're men that, fer one reason or another, the law couldn't touch. I do know that he's saved me many a headache. He'd give a man the shirt off his back if he thought he needed it. He can be gentle as a woman—or hard as chilled steel. But he gets results. He's sure helped me out plenty of times."

"But—what does he do for a living?"

Downey smiled bleakly. "Oh, John gets along. He claims to work a location up there on the crick. But I've never caught him at any harder work than shakin' dice with Old Cush. I've got my own good guess. He's turned in thousands of dollars to the police that was stole from individuals by some of them rascals he's sentenced—but never a damn cent that was stole off some big company, though I know some of those birds must have had plenty of it on 'em when they hit Halfaday. But, somehow, it always seems to mysteriously disappear."

"Sort of a Robinhood, eh?"

"Yeah—that's about it. An' I guess when the books is all balanced it might turn out that the Robinhoods of this world do a damn sight more good than a lot of other folks."

"But—do you think it would do any good for me to go up there with him and present that bill? I'd hate to make a damn fool of myself."

"Officially, I'd ruther not answer that question, one way er another. Personally, I'd say that I never heard of anyone makin' a damn fool of himself by followin' John's advice. An' I might add, off hand, that even if a thing don't do no good—it don't do no harm to try it."

"Thanks, Corporal," Tom grinned. "I guess we'll be pulling out for Indian River."

Stopping in at the office of Brandon & Sharpe on his way to the hotel, Tom found Sue Brandon alone. "Back already!" she exclaimed. "You must have just about killed J. W. He isn't used to the trail."

"Oh, he stayed up there. Claimed he needed a rest. Said he'd just loaf around and wait till I get back." The girl answered nothing, and as she turned toward her desk Tom noticed an unwonted droop to the corners of her lips. "Cheer up," he grinned. "J. W.'s all right. Couple of days' rest and he'll be as good as ever."

"I wasn't thinking of J. W.," she said, in a low voice.

"Wasn't thinking of him! Then what are you looking so sad about? I thought you were worrying because he'd got all tired out."

"I'm worrying, all right—but not because he's tired. Oh, I don't know. I—I'm afraid."

"Afaid! Afraid of J. W.?'

"Not afraid that he'll harm me—it's more of a distrust than a fear. From little things I've heard, here and there—I—oh, I can't explain it exactly—it's all vague and indefinite."

"Then—you don't love him?" Tom interrupted fiercely. "You don't love him—but you're going ahead and marrying him anyway?"

"No. I don't love him," the girl replied, in the same dull voice. "There—I've told you now. I don't love him—and I never could love him. But—I'm going ahead and marry him anyway. Daddy trusts him—thinks he's a good business man. And he favors the match." Something—some inner dam seemed suddenly to let go, and the next instant words were pouring from the girl's lips in a torrent of pent-up emotion. "Oh, why did you go away? Why didn't you stay on with daddy—with *us?* You had a good job! And we—we—— Oh, you just ruined everything! I promised to marry him soon after you left because I was angry at you for going! I don't love him! I can never love him! He's been after me to name our wedding day, and I've kept putting it off till I couldn't put it off any longer. I don't love him—but I could have loved you, Tom! I—I did love you. And I know you love me. I knew—long before you—you told me—that day you went away. I know that daddy intended to take you in as a partner—you to do the field work—and he to furnish the money. And, oh—we could have been so happy together. But, now——"

"When is this wedding day?" Tom's words crashed into her unfinished sentence.

"Why—it's—it's the first day of April. And—oh I despise J. W. But daddy wants me to marry his partner."

"April fool's day, eh? Fine! That's great. And—oh, boy—will somebody get fooled! Remember—that's a promise. You will marry your dad's partner on April fool's day. I'll be there, and, believe me, I'll hold you to that promise. In fact, I can hardly wait. You bet I'll be there!"

The girl stared at him in wide-eyed astonishment. "Tom Jorden—are you drunk?"

"Not drunk. Just happy. It's the way of the North. So long. I've got to see a man!"

The door slammed behind him leaving the girl standing there staring in blank amazement.

CHAPTER XXXIV

J. W. ARBITRATES

EARLY the following morning, Tom, followed by Black John, opened the door and stepped into the little shack on Indian River as Sharpe was finishing his breakfast.

"What! Back already!" J. W. cried.

"And this man—is he—er—one of your crew?"

"This is Mr. Smith," Tom replied, and turning to Black John, he said: "Mr. Smith, meet Mr. Joel W. Stowe—alias J. W. Sharpe."

"What! What's that?" The man leaped from his chair, and glared at them.

Tom continued, ignoring the interruption. "Mr. Stowe was at one time a resident of Big Falls, Minnesota. He used to be president of the Farmers' and Merchants' Bank there—until he skipped out with twenty thousand dollars of a grain company's money, after looting the bank, and murdering a tramp."

In the semi-darkness of the little room Sharpe's face had gone paper white. His mouth sagged open, and his tongue trembled visibly as he strove to speak. "What—what—are you—saying? I—I don't know what—you're—talking—about."

"Oh, yes, you do. You know exactly what I'm talking about."

"Who—who—*are* you?"

"I'm Tom Jorden—John Jorden's son. You remember the last time you saw John Jorden—there in your pasture, where the tramp was building the underpass. He asked you to honor a couple of checks, and you promised to do so the minute the bank opened in the morning. But you weren't at the bank in the morning, Stowe—you were riding a freight, headed West—with the twenty thousand dollars on you that Mr. Kay entrusted to you for safekeeping—safekeeping, Stowe—that's a huge joke, isn't it? Almost as good as the joke you played on John Jorden when you skipped out and left him to face the charge of murdering you!"

As Tom talked the man's eyes never left his face, but Black John noticed that he was rapidly gaining control of himself.

"It's all a damned lie! You're crazy. Raving, ranting crazy! I never heard of Big Falls, Minnesota. I never heard of a John Jorden. I was never president of a bank. I——"

Black John interrupted. "Hold on, Stowe. It ain't——"

"My name is Sharpe—not Stowe! I never knew a Stowe!"

"Mebbe not. But you ain't sharp as you try to make out, neither. As I was goin' to say, it ain't no use to stand there an' tell us all the places, an' the folks you never heard of, an' name all the banks you never was president of. It would be a waste of time."

"Who are you?"

"Me? Smith is the name. An' by way of further identification, you might take a look at this." The big man turned back the front of his shirt to disclose the badge of a United States marshal—a badge, be it known, that he had purloined from a misguided American official who had made the mistake of showing up on Halfaday Creek, a year or so before. "It ain't no use in you resistin' arrest, Stowe. You might better come along peaceable."

"Arrest! What are you arresting me for?"

"Well—murder will prob'ly be the main item. There'll be several other charges of a minor nature. I wouldn't worry about them, though, if I was you. What the hell do you care how many years they soak you fer—after yer hung?"

"You mean—you're arresting me! Taking me back to—to—"

"Yeah—you might as well say it—to Big Falls, Minnesota. There's lots of folks back there that'll be mighty glad to see you, Stowe. Fact is, when I left there, after Tom, here, let us know that he'd located you, folks was practically mobbin' the jedge to git put on the jury list fer yer trial."

"But—this is Canada! You have no authority to arrest me here. A United States marshall has no authority in the Yukon!"

"Well, now, Stowe—I'm glad you brought that p'int up. Yer contention seems to have a modicum of merit. We ain't bloodthirsty folks—me an' Tom ain't. Whilst we'll have to admit we'd delight to see you kickin' on the end of a tight one, we're willin' to forego the pleasure, an' sort of arbitrate this thing."

"What do you mean—arbitrate?"

"I mean arbitrate—you know—like the Government used to arbitrate with the Injuns. When they wanted some more of the land that belonged to the Injuns, the president, he'd call the chiefs together an' arbitrate. The Government would get the land—an' the Injuns would get a promise."

"But suppose I refuse?"

The big man grinned. "It's all the same to us—as a matter of his'try, I might p'int out that all them Injuns that refused to arbitrate is dead."

"What is there to arbitrate?"

"Well, Tom, here, has got a little bill agin you. It's fer fifty-one thousand, seven hundred eighty-four dollars and ninety-four cents. That amount bein' the twenty thousan' dollars you stole off'n John Jorden by not honorin' them checks, together with accrued interest, to date. There ort to be another thousan' added fer my expenses up here—but if you come acrost without no bickerin' we'll let the Minnesota authorities worry about that."

"This is an outrage! It's blackmail. It's a hold-up. It's illegal."

"So's murder, an' embezzlement illegal—as you'll damn well find out, if you don't dicker."

"How do I know that this is not sheer bluff?"

Black John turned to Tom. "Show him them papers—the letter he wrote yer pa—an' the description he copied off'n the location record, an' that order he wrote out fer that lumber. You'll note, Stowe," he continued, as the man scanned the scripts with staring eyes, "that the handwritin' on all of 'em is the same—an' likewise, them two thumbprints is identical. Handwritin' an' thumbprints don't lie. If there was ever an open and shut case, Stowe—this is it. Why, any jury in the world would convict you on that evidence—even one that didn't have you already convicted before it was swore in."

Stowe's face had gone dead white again. He made one more attempt at defiance. "But—I still maintain that you can't arrest me. You have no authority. I'll fight extradition with every cent I've got in the world."

"Yeah? Well, believe me, brother—money's a damn pore weapon to fight burlap extradition with."

"Burlap extradition! What's burlap extradition?"

"It consists in tunkin' a man on the skull with any handy blunt instrument, an' wroppin' him in a gunny sack, an' draggin' him acrost the line. It's quicker than the other kind, havin' be'n devised to do away with red tape."

"But—it's illegal! It's not according to law!"

"That's ondoubtless true. But it's accordin' to the way of the North. An' I'll p'int out that it ain't goin' to be no hell of a chore. The line ain't only three-quarters of a mile back of here, an' you'll drag easy on the snow."

"It's impossible to pay that bill. I have no such amount of cash. Every cent I own is invested in a partnership with Sam Brandon—fifty thousand dollars."

"That'll be okay. Jest set down there to the table an' Tom'll loan you his pen. Here's some paper I fetched along from the hotel. You jest make out an assignment in full of all yer holdin's to Tom—lock, stock, an' barrel—so help'e God, an' we'll call it square. Of course, there'll still be the item of them odd dollars an' cents—one thousand seven hundred forty-eight dollars and ninety-four cents. But Tom'll have to take that out of the profits, if any. An' before you write, I might warn you to look an' see if that there penholder's clean. If you'd done that on a couple of previous occasions, you'd be a happier man today, Stowe—an' a richer one, too."

The man made the assignment as dictated by Black John, signed it, and handed it to Tom, who pocketed it.

"An' now," Black John said, "if I was you, I'd hit fer the outside as fast as God would let me. I'm givin' you a tip, gratis. Don't never show yer face in Dawson agin. If you do, Downey'll pick up up, shore as hell. An' that there hangin' down to Big Falls will come off as planned. You see, the Governor of Minnesota notified the Mounted to be on the lookout fer you—jest in case somethin' might happen to me. Downey was talkin' to me an' Tom about you last evenin'—claimed he'd prob'ly pick you up today. That's why we snuck up here in sech a hell of a hurry—figurin' it was more to Tom's interest to git his pa's money back than to see you hung. So if I was you, I'd git goin'."

"But—I have no dogs—no food—no money!"

"You kin take Tom's dogs—an' there's plenty of grub here in the shack. As fer money—you'll have to shift fer yerself—an' I'm warnin' you—there ain't but damn few banks an' grain elevators along the road you're goin'."

AS THE two headed back toward Dawson, Tom glanced at the big man who strode at his side. "Are you really a United States Marshal?" he asked.

"Hell—no! Whatever put that idee into yer head?"

"Why—that badge you showed Stowe!"

"Oh, that! Hell, that's jest a trinket I picked up somewheres. A man can't never tell when a little thing like that'll come in handy."

"And, another thing—I didn't know the line was anywhere near Indian River."

"It ain't. You chechakos gits the damnedest idees!"

"But you told Stowe it was only three-quarters of a mile back of the shack."

"Did I? By cripes, Tom, I believe yer right! My mistake. I must of thought I was up to Cush's! That's jest the distance the line is from the back door of his saloon!"

"I don't know how I can ever thank you for what you've done for me. I never in the world could have put that over alone. And there didn't seem to be any legal redress."

"There hardly ever is any. But you don't need to thank me. Hell—Porcupine Jack was a friend of mine! An' from what I hear you're pretty much of a man yerself."

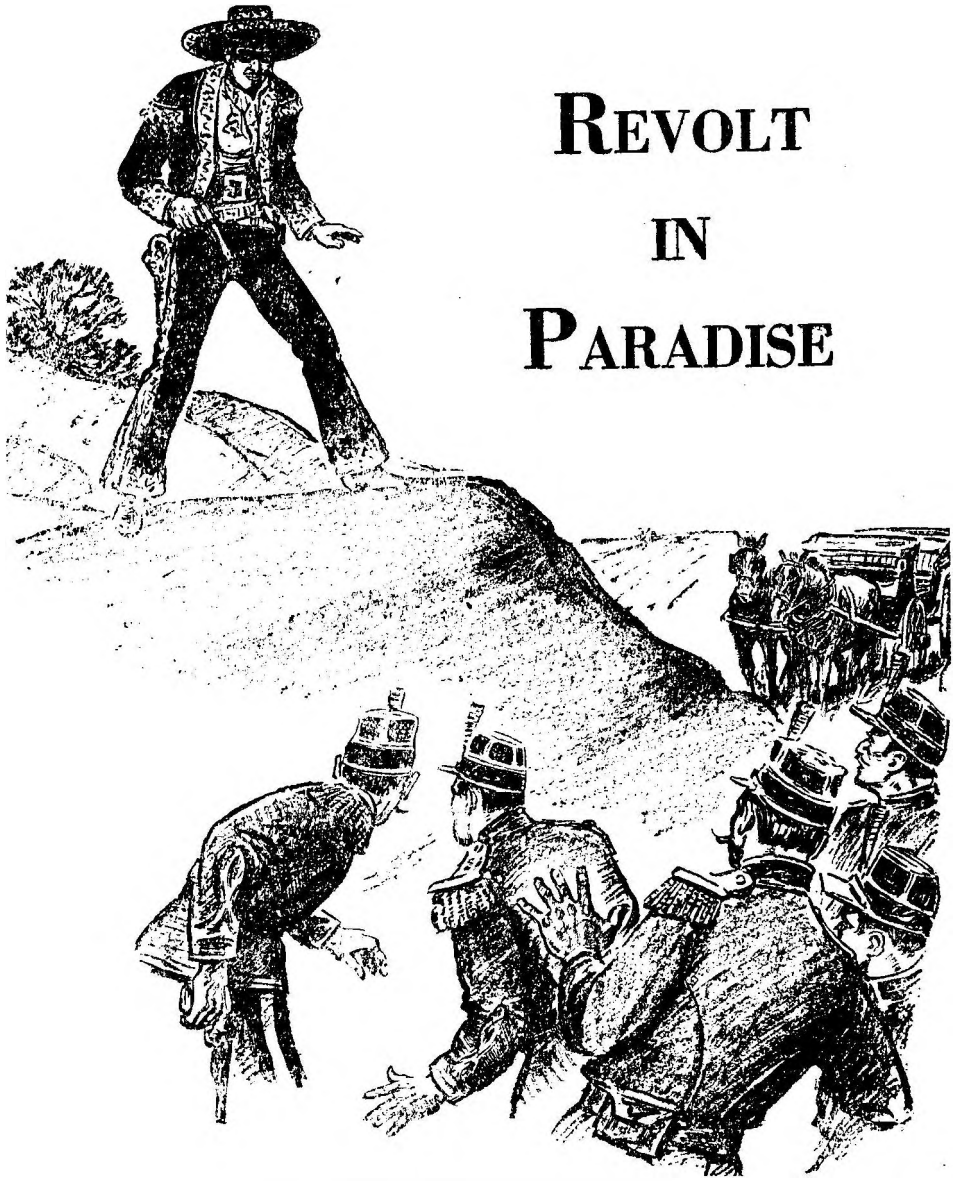
"Will you promise to do me one more favor?"

The big man grinned. "I will, providin' it don't involve no moral trepitude."

Tom laughed. "It don't. I want you to come to our wedding—Sue Brandon's and mine. It'll be on April first. She told me she'd promised to marry her dad's partner on that day. And I'm holding her to that promise. And I want you to meet my wife."

"Good fer you, son! Don't worry, I'll be there."

THE END



REVOLT IN PARADISE

By SEABURY QUINN

Author of "The Black Wolf Prowls," etc.

WHERE the line of blue hills shrugged their mist-cloaked shoulders against the bright evening sky the black-clad rider reined his black mount in and threw his head back, listening intently. Horse and rider made a statuesque group silhouetted against the first lucence of the rising moon. The mare was a small, beautifully-built half-Arab with delicately arching neck, small, sensitive, sharp-pointed ears, nostrils that flared and quivered at each

He Would Take That Master Outlaw, the Black Wolf, Must First Learn to Sew the Wind Up in a Sack!

breath, and great brown luminous eyes. Nowhere on her was there any spot of white to mar the midnight smoothness of her satiny black coat, and against her sable gloss the silver mountings of her harness shone with starlike brightness. The man was, like his steed, all black—black, low-crowned *sombrero* with silver lace about its band and brim, short, black tight-fitting jacket trimmed with silver embroidery, bell-bottomed pantaloons slit halfway to the knee at the outer seam and laced with silver cords. On high-heeled boots of Spanish leather he wore star-shaped silver rowels.

A figure to arrest attention—and fear—for though his silver-mounted velvet costume proclaimed him a dandy, the mask of black velvet across his face marked him as something far more sinister—*El Lobo Negro*—The Black Wolf. On his head a price of a hundred thousand *pesos* had been placed, and placed in vain, for he who would take The Black Wolf must first, to quote the Spanish proverb, "learn to sew the wind up in a sack."

That very morning as the coach from Yuma Linda, loaded with a cask of specie for the long unpaid soldiers of the *presidio* had thundered down the highway with mule bells tinkling and the sun aglint on the brass buttons and tall leather shakos of its escort, it swung around an elbow curve to find a monstrous boulder squarely in its path. The guard and outriders dismounted and bent to the task of prying it away with crowbars, but it was stubborn as a balky mule and heavy as a guilty conscience, so it was more than half an hour before they had cleared a way for the coach. Then:

"*Buenos dias, caballeros*—good morning, gentlemen," a pleasant but satirical voice greeted, and they looked up from their labors to behold a black-clad masked man standing on the bluff that overhung the roadway. "Your appetite for breakfast should be good after your morning exercise," he continued affably, "and I would not delay you. But your speed will be much greater if you leave the cask of coin in the road—"

"*Ojos de Dios!*" a dragoon swore and reached for a carbine leaning against a roadside rock. But his fingers never touched it, for the thunder of a pistol drowned his curse, and he fell back a reeling step, then dropped to the road like a pole-axed ox, his right arm shattered midway between wrist and elbow.

One of the outriders snatched at the horse pistol in his belt. A slug ripped through his hand and the weapon clattered harmlessly to the tiles.

Then came a perfect shower of hot lead. Not two or three shots, but five, eight, ten ploughed into the earth at their feet, and the black-clothed figure on the bank above them was veiled in a drifting mist of blue smoke.

"*Por Dios!*" panted one of the troopers. "*Son revolvedores*—they are revolvers!"

It was too true. The Black Wolf carried the new weapon invented by the *Yanqui* firearms maker, Samuel Colt. Tales of the dreadful slaughter the new pistol could inflict had been heard everywhere, but none of the troopers had actually seen one, for as yet the Mexican army had not adopted it. It had been whispered that the pistol fired a hundred shots without reloading, and had more weight in its blow than any musket. A moment since they'd seen a man knocked sprawling to the earth by a bullet and the blood that spurted from the outrider's smashed hand bore vivid testimony to the striking power of the *gringo* gun.

"*Misericordia — piedad* — have mercy; show us pity!" begged the four remaining troopers and the wounded outrider. "Be pleased to spare us, *Señor Lobo Negro!*" Six pairs of hands were raised imploringly, and the driver of the coach held his reins in one hand and raised the other in mute supplication.

The Black Wolf laughed, not gibingly nor in mockery, but pleasantly, as if at some good jest. "Drive on, *amigos*," he gestured with the muzzle of a pistol from which smoke still trailed in a faint plume. "Drop the coin in the roadway, take up your wounded and drive on. Go, friends, and quickly, or I may change my mind, and—"

When they had left as fast as beaten mules could carry them he cleaned his empty pistols carefully and carefully reloaded them. The morning had been profitable, and no one had been killed. That pleased him, for despite the terror which his name inspired The Black Wolf was no wanton killer.

But the *comandante* of San Esteban el

Mártir was not pleased. Like all the garrison, he had been unpaid almost a year, his money was long since exhausted and his credit badly frayed. Moreover, there was a certain dark-eyed señorita at the Cantina de las dos Palomas who had recently denied him her vivid smiles and luscious red lips, preferring, naturally enough, to give her time to rich young ranchers who could punctuate their words of love with the sweet clink of gold and silver coin.

So Don Señor Miguel de Cortez y Palma, captain of dragoons and *comandante* of San Esteban el Mártir swore volubly for half an hour in a language whose richness in profanity is equalled only by its wealth of nastiness and ordered out his whole command, his Indian trackers and the bloodhounds that were kept to trail prisoners escaped from the *calabozo* and such dull-witted *peons* as attempted to run off from their masters, for though the Constitution forbade slavery, the great land-owners had devised the scheme of keeping their laborers constantly in debt so they could be hunted and returned as absconding delinquents if they sought to leave the land where they drudged without wages from sunup to sunset.

THE Black Wolf had filled his purse with coins from the cask, cached the rest in a convenient place, and headed for an inn where he could put his horse up and change the costume that was his trade-mark. After that he'd mingle with the citizens and soldiers unknown and unsuspected, for none of his victims had ever seen his face, and in ordinary dress he was as little like *El Lobo Negro* as Robin Hood in court costume would have resembled the outlaw of Sherwood Forest.

He was in no hurry, for he did not wish to reach his destination until sunset, so when he came to a small stream that murmured through a patch of rustling woodland he took the saddle from his mare and bent above the placid water to refresh himself.

The face that looked back at him from the natural mirror of the brooklet was that of a man in his late twenties or early thirties, bronzed from exposure to wind and sun, with a wide, pleasant mouth defined by a thin pencil-line of black mustache and the tiniest suggestion of a beard, a mere inverted exclamation point of hair beneath his lower lip. The black hair that grew well forward at his temples and dipped into a widow's peak on his forehead curled crisply, and the eyes beneath the straight black brows were smoky gray. Just now they sparkled with amusement, but it was not hard to tell that they could freeze into a hardness cold and unyielding as ice. It was a face that negatived his costume, it might have been that of an Englishman—more probably an Irishman—certainly it was not either Mexican or Spanish. And the English words he spoke with an American accent harmonized as perfectly with his features as they clashed with his clothing: "Who'd think that ten years ago you kept books in the Peck's Slip Savings Bank, and didn't know if you were more afraid of old Ryerson than you were in love with his daughter or not? What's become of that John Barlow? Where's the lad who went to Sunday School and stayed to church so he could watch the flowers nodding on Miss Sallie Ryerson's bonnet from the gallery, John Barlow? Where did they bury the boy who ate porridge without sugar for his breakfast and went without his luncheon so he could save a hundred dollars from his wages and screw up his courage to ask Sallie to marry him?"

The face that looked at him from the brooklet seemed to take on sharper lines. The pleasant, smiling mouth grew thinner, straighter, and the eyes hardened. There was an edge to his voice as he answered the self-addressed questions: "They killed him in the fo'castle of the slave ship *Janet Snowden* when they'd shanghaied him aboard her; they buried him at sea with the dead slaves they tossed to the sharks when cholera hit the ship on the run from Daga to Rio. They— Shut up, you fool!" he told himself sharply. "There's no use crying over spilled milk or mooning over old times. Sallie Ryerson's forgotten that you ever lived, and so has everybody else in New York, except perhaps Mrs. McGonigle. You owed her two weeks' board when you were shanghaied, and there's not much chance old Ryerson would pay her out of your deposit in his bank. Forget about all that. John Barlow's dead, and so is Sallie Ryerson, as far as you're concerned. You're The Black Wolf. You robbed the Yuma Linda stage

today, remember? There's a price upon your head and—right now you're sleepy as the devil, and going to take a nap!" Rolling himself in his black-and-silver *serape* he couched his cheek on a bent arm and in another moment slept as peacefully as if he'd never held a stage-coach up or robbed a *hacienda* or played ducks and drakes with death while half the soldiers in the province rode hot on his trail.

THE sun was sliding down the western sky when he awakened to a sudden sense of apprehension. At first he could not say if he had started at some unfamiliar sound, or what it might have been, but instinctively he felt he was in peril. Deep in his inner consciousness a vague, intangible tocsin was sounding an alarm.

He lay listening intently, scarcely breathing. It was quiet in the woodland. Quiet, but not noiseless; the air was filled with small noises, the murmur of the insects wavering about the blossoms, the cheeping of small birds that foraged in the grass and branches, the trickle of the brooklet on its bed of mossy gravel—sounds so familiar as to be only parts of the woods quiet, and to be only half-heard, as one half-hears the ticking of a clock.

Then suddenly he was aware of it, and a prickling sensation, as of a sudden chill, ran up his arms and across his neck. Above the throaty murmur of the wood pigeons busy with their love-making there rose another sound, as faint and slender as a strand of spider-web, but unmistakable. The baying of a hound.

It was so faint that he could scarcely hear it, but as he strained his ears it came again. A low moaning, almost like the whining hum of a wild bee, that grew in volume steadily, mounting higher and higher, then ended with a yelp, ceased altogether, then began again.

He knew the brutes that trailed him. Not the wrinkle-browed and gentle-eyed bloodhounds of the north who, when they found their quarry, were playful as puppies and almost harmless as kittens, but *sabuesos,* great, savage beasts cross-bred from hunting hounds and Cuban mastiffs, with the keen scent, speed and persistence of the first and the great bulk and ferocity of the second. A man run down by one of them would be in as great danger as if attacked by a cougar, and when they ran in a pack—!

"*Querida* — sweetheart!" he whistled softly to his grazing mare. "*Aqui, novia*—come here, darling." Quickly he swung the saddle to her back, made the cinch fast, and adjusted halter and bridle. "Your heels must save us both, now, *novia,*" he whispered as he touched her flanks with his rowels. "*Vaya, anda*—go quickly!"

The black mare fairly skimmed the turf as she ran with her neck extended and nostrils flaring. The miles reeled off behind her pounding hoofs, three, five, a dozen. Then she slacked her pace a little and her proud head lowered. Nothing foaled could keep the mad speed at which she had run indefinitely, and her breath came faster and her sides were heaving as she almost stumbled to her knees.

"*Pobrecita mia*—poor little thing!" The Black Wolf drew in the bridle, slowing her to a walk, and looked around him with intently narrowed eyes. To his right clattered a small stream, bawling noisily on jagged rocks, but with a smooth and shallow ford some half mile away. Beyond the stream there rose a high knoll terminating in a saw-tooth ridge, and back of that there sloped a long grassy *savana* which reached to a dense woods some miles away. The hill-top made a natural fortress, for the deep, swift stream with its sharp-pointed boulders was impassable except at the ford. The dogs were gaining on him rapidly, their baying was so loud and strong it came to him almost continuously, though as yet he could not see the brutes. The soldiers would not be far behind, he knew. His mount was so winded she could not go another mile at any speed, and if he let her travel slowly they were sure to overtake him; if he hurried her she'd fall dead in her tracks from exhaustion. "I think that we shall stand and fight it out right here, *dulcinea,*" he told the mare. "Forward, sweetheart, only to the top of the hill. It is not far."

The spent mare paused to suck a draught of cool brook-water, then, refreshed, scrambled to the hilltop. "*Abajo*—down!" her rider ordered as he slipped from the saddle. "Rest thee on the soft grass and get thy strength back, little one. There will be enough of running to do later, I'm afraid."

From the crest of the hill he looked back

on the trail by which he'd come. Already the dogs were in view, eight mighty tawny brutes with black markings, each almost large as a calf, running in close formation, noses to the earth, tails up. As they drew nearer their speed increased, for the trail grew warmer every foot, and they were scenting on the run. At last the leader of the pack, a scarred and cunning veteran, threw his head back and uttered a deep-throated bay. He had sighted the quarry and gave tongue to a wild view-halloo, leaping forward as if he had been loosed from a leash. The other dogs took up the wild triumphant chorus, speeding onward with great leaps, no longer running by the scent, but with their bloodshot, savage eyes fixed on their prey.

Now they had reached the ford and splashed into the water, now they were at the lower slope of the hill, no longer in formation, but scattered in a sort of skirmish line and running with the silence of assassins.

There were twelve shots in his revolvers, but the odds were far from being in his favor. Thirty yards was about the limit of effective range for the pistols, there were eight dogs running with the speed of an ill wind, and they were spread out in an arc of more than sixty yards span. He would have to fire eight telling shots before they could run ninety feet or grapple hand-to-fang with at least one of them. Drawing the long curved sword that swung against his left leg from its scabbard he thrust it point-down in the earth before him, then, pistols ready, waited the assault.

HE HAD not long to wait. It was almost incredible, the speed with which the great beasts rushed up the slope. In a moment they were in range and he fired at the leader of the pack, catching him in the brisket and knocking him over like a ten-pin. The other seven took no notice of their comrade's fall, but, eyes agleam, foam dripping from their jowls, came rushing on.

Nimbly and gracefully as a dancer he swung himself in a short arc, firing bullet after bullet at the charging pack. Hound after hound went down, but on the others came, no more intimidated by their mates' deaths than if each had been alone upon the quest. He had missed five shots, killed five and wounded one of the brutes so it lay writhing on the grass, but even in its death-throes it attempted to get near enough to close with him, wriggling, twisting and crawling up the slope while blood dripped from its gaping mouth and low whines mingled with its panting breath.

The two remaining members of the pack were old, skilled campaigners, used to closing with their quarry when it stood at bay. One charged him from the front, the other circled round to leap upon him from the side.

He fired his last remaining bullet at the brute that advanced from the front, heard the *wough!* the beast gave as the slug tore through its right foreleg and crippled it, and hurled his empty pistol straight at the great buff-and-black head as the dog came on, limping painfully, but not disabled by its wound.

The animals leaped at him like twin missiles from a double-barreled gun, one from the front, the other from the left, with their quarry as the apex of their triangle.

He had snatched his sword out of the earth and dragged his bowie knife from its sheath, and as the dogs launched their assault he dropped back a pace, half turning in his stride so that the beast upon his left was nearer than its fellow. The creature uttered a low growl, sank almost flat against the earth and then leaped straight for his throat. But in the instant that it paused to poise itself for the spring the man shifted his sword point, lowering it and thrusting upward as the great brute leaped, so that the sharp steel struck the catapulting monster just behind the point where legs and body joined, and man's weight and dog's leap blended to give greater power to the thrust, and fur and hide and belly were ripped open like a canvas sack slashed with a knife, and blood and entrails gushed out as the hound rolled on the ground, yelping in a high falsetto that was absolutely terrifying coming from its great barrel of a throat.

He had no time to catch his breath. The wounded beast was on him even as its fellow fell, and he felt the cloth of his sleeve give way with a sharp rasping rip as long fangs fixed in it. Only its broken, useless forefoot had prevented the great brute from

making a full leap and fastening its teeth in his throat. In an instant man and dog were wrestling on the grass.

Nineteen out of twenty men would have fought to free their arms from the hound's mouth as they fell underneath its charge, but The Black Wolf was the twentieth. Instead of striving to wrench free from the great jaws that clamped upon his sleeve, he bent his elbow till his muscles knotted into a hard joint and thrust the point of his bent arm as far as he could into the gaping mouth. The beast must free its fangs in order to be able to bite him a second time, and to do this it dragged away from the gagging elbow thrust into its mouth.

Thus for a moment they were still, the man flat on his back with the beast standing over him, its forefeet planted each side of his shoulders, hind feet straining at the ground to drag loose from the arm that pressed between its jaws. And in that split second of stillness The Black Wolf struck. His bowie knife flashed upward, fleshing half its blade in the beast's brisket, then dragged backward toward the hind legs, cutting through the beast's soft, unprotected under-belly to the groin, then turning to shear a transverse cut across the slashed stomach.

The hound's cry heightened to a scream of pure anguish as the knife pierced skin and flesh and entrails, and the man drew up his knees, kicked upward with both feet and thrust the dying beast away.

His jacket was in tatters and blood stained his fine white linen shirt, but it was the blood of his brute adversaries. Except for damage which a tailor could repair—or replace—he had suffered little injury, but he was shaking like a leaf in a wind storm as he regained his feet and looked across the rolling country whence the hounds had come. *"Carrajo!"* he exclaimed as he raised his left hand to shade his eyes. *"Los otros perros*—the other dogs!"

RIDING in close formation, sunlight glinting on their polished buttons and tall leather shakos, came a squadron of dragoons—fifty soldiers mad with lust of the chase and seething with resentment at the man who had appropriated their pay.

The Black Wolf grinned, but there was little humor in the grimace that bared his teeth. Since he began riding the highways he had shaken dice with death a hundred times and more, but this time it seemed that the dice were loaded and his chances of a lucky throw slim.

He hurried to his mount, withdrew the carbine from the long holster hanging from the right side of the saddle just beneath the stirrup and tore the cartridge box open, emptying its contents in his hand. Then, once more at the crest of the hill, he laid the cartridges before him in a row.

At the head of the column of dragoons two men in *peon* dress rode shaggy mustangs. Indian trackers, keen on the trail as the bloodhounds he had fought, they were, and he could see they followed the dogs' trail so easily that they were not obliged to slow their horses from a gallop as they read the track the hounds had left.

The leader of the dragoons raised his hand to signal a halt, his second in command rode up for a brief consultation, then the column deployed in a long line, carbines were unslung, and they came forward again at a trot. For a moment they paused at the rushing stream, drew into column again, then trotted toward the ford.

"This is it!" he told himself as he raised his heavy carbine to his shoulder, glanced along the sights and squeezed the trigger. The weapon was a *zündnadel,* one of the famous needle guns invented by Professor Johann von Dreyse, which later were to wreak such dreadful havoc when Prussia crushed Austria in seven weeks of warfare. It was breech-loading, firing a conical bullet encased in a paper cartridge with the powder charge and the detonator was exploded by the firing pin or "needle" which passed through the charge. This made loading quicker, for it was unnecessary to stop and bite the cartridge, ram it home and place a firing-cap beneath the hammer. Moreover, it could kill at a range of a thousand yards—more than twice as far as any other military weapon then available. The German rifle gave a vicious crack and the sergeant riding to the left of the commander threw his arms up with a scream and fell from his saddle.

Consternation swept the column of dragoons. *"Guardaos*—look out! *Esta la rayada del diablo*—it is the devil's rifle he uses!"

While The Black Wolf drew the breech lock of his rifle back and thrust a fresh load into the firing chamber the dragoons recovered somewhat from their panic. At the *commandante's* cry of *"Adelante*—forward!" they strung out into a file and dashed at the narrow ford, the water splashing up about their horses' fetlocks.

Crack! The *zündnadel* discharged a second shot and the foremost horse reared up on its hind legs, then crashed backwards, falling heavily against the mount behind it so it lost its footing and fell floundering in the waist-deep water while its rider clung to the saddle and cried lustily on all the saints for succor. The flailing hoofs of the half-drowning, panic-stricken beast knocked another mustang's feet from under it, and in a moment the ford boiled with wild confusion. *"Atrás, por el amor de Dios*—back for the love of God!" the dragoons shouted while their commander raged and swore and waved his saber futilely.

"Forward, you dogs!" he screamed. "He is but one and you are half a hundred. Charge! Rush him! He cannot kill more than three or four of you before—"

"Even so, my captain," broke in a sergeant, "but which of us will be among that three or four? Will you lead us in single file through the ford and up the hill against a man armed with that devil's gun?"

"Válgame Dios!" swore the *comandante.* "I—" his blustering retort failed under the old sergeant's ironical gaze. "Get back to shore, you filthy cowards. Fall in—form ranks!"

The troopers reined their mounts into formation and the captain turned on them with blazing eyes. "You dogs and sons of dogs!" he shouted. "You craven, dastardly poltroons—"

A rifle's sharp report sounded from the hilltop and the commander clutched his shoulder with a scream of frightened rage. "Back—retreat—draw out of range!" he shouted. "I am wounded—I am dying—"

The troop turned tail and galloped back some fifty yards and the commander slid from his saddle and lay down on the ground while his lieutenant and the old sergeant bent over him. *"No es posible—no puede*—it is impossible, he could not do it!" he moaned. "There is no gun that shoots so far—"

Crack! From the hilltop came another sharp report, and the man holding the horses of the captain, the lieutenant and the sergeant gave a yell of pain and slid from his saddle, blood soaking through the right leg of his breeches. *"Ai, ai!"* he wailed as he fell stumbling to the ground. "I am undone! I swoon! I die!" His cries of dismay were echoed by his comrades. They were a full eight hundred yards from their quarry—more than three times the farthest range of their own *escopetas*—yet he picked them off as calmly as a marksman shooting pigeons. With a clatter of accoutrement they retreated another hundred yards, taking their wounded with them.

The Black Wolf thrust another cartridge in his gun, glanced down his sights and pressed his trigger for another shot, then stopped himself in the act. He could wound a few more of them, possibly kill them, but the result would be the same in the end. Already the shadows were growing longer. In another hour it would be twilight, full dark in two hours. Then—

THE *comandante* sat propped up against a stone, the Indian trackers and his sergeant and lieutenant gathered around him. They seemed in earnest conversation and The Black Wolf wondered idly if it were worth while to send a shot into the group to demoralize them, then thought better of it. It would only make them draw a little farther off, and one or two—or five or ten—less opponents would make small difference when the final showdown came.

Presently he saw the lieutenant salute and walk to his horse. With the Indian trackers riding to his right and left he set off downstream at a canter, followed by some thirty dragoons. The rest dismounted, tethered their horses, and with unslung carbines watched the hilltop where he lay waiting.

He understood the strategem as well as if he had participated in their council. Some ten miles to the west there was another ford. The dragoons under the lieutenant could reach it in an hour or less, cross over, circle round and take him from the rear before dark. Meanwhile the men remaining under the command of the wounded captain would watch his position. If he attempted to retreat they would rush him, if he made bold to ride toward them they would over-

whelm him, if he waited till the party under the lieutenant had crossed the lower ford—"Tied down, *pos Dios!*" he muttered. "John Barlow, they have got you tethered like a sheep waiting for the butcher!"

But had they? He had a trick or two left in his bag. Perhaps—

Slipping down the far side of the hill he lay with the barest tip of his sombrero showing over the ridge, then drew his watch out of his pocket. He'd wait fifteen minutes, then——

The long hand of the watch moved across the dial slowly. Five, ten, twelve minutes it registered. The waiting soldiers grew restless. One of them pointed to the tip of the hat showing motionless upon the hill crest, whispered something to the man next him and turned toward the sergeant, seeming to ask a question. For a moment they stood at gaze, then, with carbines at the ready, advanced toward the ford.

Barlow waited till they reached the water and began to wade. Then deliberately he took aim and fired. The first man in the line spun round, threw up his arms and staggered back against the next. The whole party wheeled in a panic-stricken right-about and raced back toward the main command, but before they reached it the rifle had cracked again and another soldier toppled over, falling on his face and lying still.

Three times the process was repeated. Three times The Black Wolf waited motionless until a scouting party left the dragoons' ranks, held his fire until they reached the ford, then knocked down one or two before they could complete a retreat. And each time the interval between the attacks became longer.

At last, when he had waited almost twenty minutes without any movement coming from the dragoons, he slipped off his hat, fixed it on a stick and lay waiting. It was almost twilight now and it would be hard to shoot accurately. "I'll just give 'em one for luck," he grinned, took careful aim and fired. A soldier squatting on the grass gave a grunt of surprised pain, pressed both hands to his side and rolled over kicking.

"*Dios y el diablo*—God and the devil!" screamed the commander. "We are still in his range. Lift me up, some of you; carry me away, or I shall be murdered before they take him!"

"And that should give you something to think about for a while, *Señor Comandante,*" grinned The Black Wolf as he slipped down the steep hillside to his horse, leaving his empty hat to stand sentry on the hilltop.

"Up, sweetheart!" he whispered to his mare as he reached her. "Softly, step softly, little darling. We must not let them hear the pounding of your hoofs."

The black mare seemed to understand perfectly, and stepped quietly as a belled cat till she had reached the level land that stretched beyond the bottom of the hill. "Now, *novia mia,* show them what thou canst do!" he touched her gleaming sides with his rowels. "Thy heels must save our necks this day!"

THREE quarters of an hour later he had reached the dense woodland and slacked his breakneck pace. Two hours later, as the new moon rose above the distant mountains with the graceful audacity of youth, he rode along the broad highway toward San Pablo.

The hounds were dead, the soldiery had felt The Black Wolf's fangs and would be licking their wounds for some time. He had nothing to engage his attention but dinner—and he was empty as a kettle-drum. "Forward, sweetheart," he told his mare, "we break our fast within the hour, and by the shining face of Gabriel I'm ready to do full justice to a meal." Softly he began to sing:

"One day in God's name
I left Havana—
No one saw me go
Unless it were myself—"

"*Dios mio!*" he exclaimed softly as his mare shied violently from a dark shape at the roadside. "*Esto que es*—" his hand dropped to the pistol at his right hip, but loosed its grip as he saw that it was a woman kneeling at a wayside shrine, so sunk in prayer that she did not realize he loomed over her.

"*Santisima Maria Magdalena,*" she besought with clasped hands as she looked upward to the image of the Magdalene. "Have pity on one who has recourse to thee!

You, too, have suffered; you, too, know what it is to give yourself for love—oh, grant that by the mortification of my suffering I may find forgiveness for my sin. *O Santisima—"* she shook with retching sobs and beat her breast with her clenched fists, bending till her brow was in the roadside dust. *"Me miserable!"*

He threw a leg across his saddle bow and dropped down to the roadway beside her. "Your pardon, *Señorita,* for disturbing your devotions," he apologized, "but I could not help overhearing your prayer." He smiled, and all the hardness went out of his face. "The blessed saints, and even the good God Himself, use human instruments to work their will, you know—"

She turned on him wide-eyed, startled. "Wh—who are you?" she faltered.

"Cascaras, Señorita, sometimes I hardly know myself. Some call me John Barlow, but they are few. Most call me"—he hesitated for a moment, then laughed a hard, metallic chuckle—*"El Lobo Negro*—The Black Wolf."

"Válgame Dios! The Black Wolf?" she drew back in sudden trembling fright. "But no, *Señor,* you surely jest. You are not he. You could not be! You wear no vizard; he is always masked. They say his face is so hideous he dare not let anyone see it—"

"Then by the bones of sainted Paul and Timothy, they lie!" he answered with another laugh. "I am surely The Black Wolf—somewhat the worse for wear after a busy day, but wholly at your service, *Señorita."*

His pleasantry evoked no answering smile. She was studying him thoughtfully, eyes wide, one finger to her lips. At last: "If you are truly The Black Wolf perhaps you can help me. They say that you are subtle as a fox and full of strategems and guile—"

"Ah, now they tell the truth," he agreed. "Indeed, my head is full of schemes and strategems as my stomach is empty—"

"Ai! Esta Vd. sin haber cenado—Oh, you have not supped, *Señor?"*

"Ni comoda, ni almuerzo—nor breakfasted nor dined," he denied with another smile. "Can you in charity tell me where I may find food?"

"But of course, *Señor."* She rose from her knees and laid her hand on his arm. "My home is but a little distance, and I, like you, have not supped. If you will do me the honor—"

Her house was little more than a peasant's hut, but scrupulously neat and clean. White-walled and red-roofed it was, with flowers blooming at the door and a grape arbor hung with purpling fruit behind. "My home and all therein are yours, *Señor,"* she announced formally as she dropped him a sweeping curtsey. "Wait but a little moment and I'll have such poor provender as I can provide ready."

Charcoal smoldered in a copper brazier and she fanned it with a palm leaf till its ash-gray blossomed into red, and set copper and earthenware utensils on its grating. In a moment the aroma of boiling lamb stew filled the room and chocolate frothed up in the pot. She lit two candles at the brazier and swept a coarse cotton cloth across the table. *"Quedarse Vd. un poco*—wait a moment," she commanded almost gaily as she hurried preparations for the meal. "You are a tonic, *Señor* Black Wolf. An hour ago I felt that I could never stomach food again, now, *por Dios,* I am hungry as a shark."

He looked about the room as candlelight expelled the shadows. It was furnished sparsely in the Mexican manner. The floor was pounded clay strewn with bright-colored rugs of Indian weave. There were a table and a few chairs of stout dark wood, and on one whitewashed wall a wooden shelf on which a row of books stood. This and a barbarically-bright rug, plus a little *relicario* in which a cup of fresh field-flowers stood before a tiny statue of the Blessed Virgin were all the ornaments.

HIS hostess seemed to fit into the room as perfectly as a picture in its frame. Her costume consisted of two garments, a white blouse or chemise of cotton decorated with bright red and blue and yellow embroidery at the edges and left open at the throat, and below this a short, full skirt or petticoat of alternately striped red, green and yellow, reaching halfway to her ankles. On unstockinged feet she wore *huaraches,* or sandals of plaited rawhide, and about her neck was hung a strand of braided human hair from which a little golden crucifix depended. At first glance she might have been taken for a *labradora* or peasant girl, but a second look would have corrected the mis-

take. The fine, white delicacy of her hands and feet showed she was not one used to laboring in field or house, her face was beautifully patrician, pure Spanish, with no trace of Indian cross-breeding. Black hair shone smoothly back from a magnolia-white forehead, her black eyes were wide-set, with drooping lids and haughty brows, her lips were full and red, a little mocking in their curve, more than a little proud. "What the deuce?" he wondered. "Is this a masquerade, or what? She dresses like a *peona* and lives in a two-room cabin, but if she's not an *aristócratica* I never saw one."

Her summons cut through his puzzled thoughts. "Come, *Señor,* the poor food is ready. If you will do me the great honor of partaking—"

The meal concluded she produced a pack of corn-husk-wrapped *cigarritos* which they first unwrapped, then rewrapped and lighted at the brazier. "And now, *Señorita?* You said that I might be of some small service to you?" He raised questioning brows.

She crossed one knee upon the other, rested her elbow on it and crouched her chin on a small fist. "I am not certain, *Señor,*" she expelled twin columns of smoke from her slim nostrils. "I doubt if anyone can really help me, but if help is really possible The Black Wolf would be most likely to give it. I am Guadalupe Joaquina Cosmé y Terán—"

"I knew it!" he exclaimed. "I was certain of it—"

"*Dios mio!* Of what, *Señor?* That I was—"

"No, *Señorita,* I had no idea who you were, but I was certain that you were no peasant girl in spite of your dress—"

"Oh?" She glanced down at her brief costume. "It is that of my country-women, *Señor.* Good, decent women, wives and mothers—"

"Of course, but not the sort of a gentlewoman—such as you are obviously—wears."

An odd expression came into her face, a look of almost challenging hauteur, as if she took pride in her humble dress. "If it is good enough for them—" she began hotly, then stopped herself with a smile. "But you do not understand. My father was a *profesor*—a teacher. Though we are pure Spanish stock and have been since the beginning, he was an ardent patriot, and left his books and school to ride with Iturbide in '21. But when the victory was won and independence achieved Don Augustino declared himself emperor. This was not what we had fought for. We wanted freedom, not only from Spain, but from the tyranny of crowns, a government in which all the people should be, as they are in the United States, created equal with inalienable rights to 'life, liberty and the pursuits of happiness.' So when the common people revolted in 1824 my father was once more on their side. The *hacendados*—the great land-owners—were on our side, too, but not from any love of liberty. *Por Dios, no!* They raised the standard of revolt because they did not want to pay their taxes, and when Don Augustino was driven out they put their own puppets in power. How much better is the common *peon's* lot today? Has he freedom? You know that he has not! Slavery is forbidden by the Constitution, but the *peon* slaves from dawn to dark without wages because his *patrón* holds him in the bondage of debt. If he revolts he is shot by the soldiers. If he tries to run away he is tracked down with savage dogs—"

"You're telling me?" he interrupted with a grim smile. "I was pursued by eight of them this morning."

"And you escaped?" she asked incredulously. "But how?"

"By killing them, *Señorita.*"

"*Maravilloso!*" She clapped her hands like a delighted child. "Oh, *Señor Lobo Negro,* we can indeed use you in our cause!"

He drew his brows down in a frown. Embroilment in a revolution was the last thing he wanted. "But your own trouble, *Señorita?*"

"Ah, yes. I did forget. My father tried to help the common men, the *labradores,* and when peaceful means had failed he led them in revolt." A change came over her face. The animation drained from it and tears made her black eyes grow dim and clouded. "They shot him; shot him like a dog beside his open grave, and with his latest breath he cried *'Viva Méjico! Viva Libertad!'*—Long live Mexico and Liberty!

"*Ai!* But there were others to take up the fight! Don José Puntas, my bethrothed, raised a band of *guerilleros* and began to harry them—alas, *Señor;* they've taken him

and in two days they shoot him as they did my father unless"—tears made her black eyes magnificent, and she hesitated, stumbled on a word, then went on resolutely—"unless I give myself to Don Luis Blanco de Nobles, colonel-commander of the military district."

"Carramba! But has he not already a wife—"

"Three of them, *Señor.* One is a lovely lady of Castille, one a *mestiza* beauty, one an Indian girl scarce past her thirteenth birthday. All but the first were married to him by an unfrocked priest—"

"Precisamente, Señorita, one understands perfectly." He nodded. Characteristically he was more interested in the practicality than in the ethics of the situation. "Will this Don Luis keep his word?"

SHE spread her narrow hands and shrugged her sloping shoulders. *"Quien sabe?* I am not sure that he will let my José go, but I am very certain he will shoot him if I do not accede—"

"And where is Don José confined?"

"In the *cabildo,* the fortress-prison at San Julio."

He nodded again, eyes narrowed in intent thought. "I see. That stands upon the Rio Verde, does it not, just where the ferry crosses to the town?"

"Sí, Señor. That is so."

He nodded a third time. "Were all of Don José's men captured with him, or has he followers at large?"

"They took him in an ambush, *Señor.* Some eight or ten of his men were with him. Those they shot at once when they had taken them. The rest—some forty or fifty—hide in their houses or the woods, leaderless and helpless."

"Humph. Poor material, but we must do the best we can with what we have. Is not tomorrow market-day at San Julio?"

"It is, *Señor,* but why—"

"No matter. Can you send a messenger to round them up? You can? Good! Have them meet me here an hour before daybreak, armed with such weapons as they can secure, and every man with a *machete* in addition to his other arms. Have all who can come mounted, and at least half of them bring women's *magnas* and *rebozos.*"

She ticked the items off on her slim fingers while she looked at him with wide-eyed amazement. "It shall be as you say, *Señor,* but why—"

He cut her question short with a raised hand. "The less you know the less you can be forced to tell if—if things go wrong, *Senorita.* I see your sleeping accommodations are strained, so with your gracious leave I will pass the night in your stable with my mare. *Buenas noches, Señorita."* He made her a profound bow.

"Señor Lobo Negro"—she swept to the floor in a deep curtsey as she gave him her hand to kiss—*"pasa Vd. noche buena*—Señor Black Wolf, may you pass a pleasant night."

A GROUP of twelve or fourteen peasant women trudged along the road to San Julio in the dusk of early morning. All were swathed to the feet in *magnas* or blanket capes, all hooded in *rebozos,* or shawls, and every one walked with a wicker tray of melons, peppers or mangoes on her head of a hanniper of fruits and vegetables strapped to her shoulders. Oddly enough, they walked in silence or conversed in whispers instead of gossipping shrilly as was the market woman's usual custom.

When they reached the *cabildo* of San Julio two of them stepped into the leaky scow that did duty for ferry, while the others gathered in a whispering knot at the gates of the fort. *"Tengo-espacio para dos mas*—I have room for two more," the ferryman cried sharply as his passengers lagged at the gates. *"Anda*—hurry—if you want to ride with me—"

The women paid him no attention and he shoved off from the shore with a shrug of resignation. Women were weird creatures, anyway. If they wished to stop and gossip on the river bank and make themselves late for the market it was no affair of his, *por Dios—*

"Que es—what goes on here?" he cried shrilly as something sharp and cold bored into his back just beneath his left shoulder blade.

One of his passengers had edged herself along the plank seat till she was directly behind him, while the other one had risen and stood with her body between him and the fort. *"Señor,* if you love life you will do as we say," the woman standing in front of

him whispered in a decidedly unfeminine voice. "When you have reached the farther bank you will pretend to stumble and drop your pole into the water—"

"Drop my pole in the river? Is that the way a veteran ferryman behaves? I should be laughed off of the river—"

"Unless you do exactly as we say you will be in the river, *Señor,* and with a hole sufficient to let your life out bored in your back. Of course, if you desire to see the blessed angels it is no affair of ours, but—"

The ferryman obeyed the order to the letter.

Meanwhile one of the market women approached the sentry standing at the gate. *"Una naranja, Señor*—an orange, *Senor?"* she asked as she drew a golden sphere from her basket. *"Son muy grato y jugoso*—they are very sweet and juicy."

"Muchas gracias, little one," the soldier grinned as he received the fruit. "A sweet and juicy orange, and perhaps an even sweeter, juicier kiss?" He laid his hand on her *rebozo* to draw it aside. "Come, do not be so coy with—*waugh!"* His choking exclamation ended half begun, for another woman had crept up behind him and driven a stiletto into his back between the shoulders, and as he staggered back she clapped a hand which was astonishingly large and hairy for a woman's over his mouth to muffle his despairing dying groan.

"Suave, quietamente—carefully, quietly," she whispered as she eased the dying man to the ground. "In a minute it will all be over, little brother, meanwhile—*Madre de Dios,* they come!"

Hoofbeats pounded on the highway and a company of twenty-five or thirty mounted men came charging down the road. All were armed with broad-bladed *machetes,* most of them had muskets or pistols, all were yelling like wild Indians on the warpath.

THE women's shrill cries answered them. *"Hace la puerta abierta*—open the gate!" they cried frenziedly as they beat on the timbers with their fists. "They come! It is the guerrillas, the rebels! Open the gate and let us in, or they will surely butcher us!"

The valves of the fort gate swung slowly back and the women rushed into the courtyard screaming in terror, but only for a moment. No sooner had they passed the portal than they threw off the *magnas* and *rebozos* of their feminine disguise and drawing knives, pistols and *machetes* fell on the astonished guards and cut them down to a man. Some of them drew stakes and hammers from their baskets and fastened the gates open, then waved wild greeting to the rushing horsemen.

A bugle screamed alarm. Bewildered soldiers tumbled sleepily from their barracks to meet a devastating hailstorm of bullets, then like an avalanche the troop of mounted men swept through the gate and into the courtyard, shouting, shooting, cutting down all opposition with their sabers and *machetes. "Viva Libertad—Viva José Puntas!*—Long live Liberty and José Puntas!" sounded the war-cry as the guerrillas emptied shot on shot into the wavering ranks of soldiery and saber and *machete* hewed limb from body and head from neck.

Colonel Don Luis Blanco de Nobles, *comandante* of the military district, came from his quarters in shirt and breeches, one hand rubbing sleepy eyes, the other holding his long sword. *"Listo que es*—what is this?" he demanded in an infuriated shout. *"Por los ojos de Dios,* is a man to get no sleep around here—"

"But certainly, my colonel," answered the black-garbed young man who had led the guerrillas in their charge, emptied two revolvers into the soldiers and now flashed a long curve-bladed saber. "You shall have all the sleep you crave—for time and for eternity, you lecherous dog who would make a maiden buy her lover's life with her virginity!"

"Por Dios ye el diablo, es El Lobo Negro á él mismo—by God and the devil, it is The Black Wolf himself!" gasped Don Luis. "At last I see your face, *Señor.* I'll know you when we meet again—"

"The Lord forbid," The Black Wolf answered piously. "From now on your address will be hell, and I have no desire to visit you. *Guarda*—on guard!"

Their blades engaged, and instantly Barlow knew he faced a master swordsman, and one who used an unfamiliar technique. Strange, subtle feints, quick, cunning ripostes such as he had never encountered bewildered and confused him. Time and again

the colonel's blade slipped past his guard, lunging straight at lungs or throat. Yet each time Barlow managed to evade the threatening edge and darting point. With a quick parry in prime he drove his adversary's blade up and the weapons locked an instant, hilt to hilt. His knife jerked out, flashing upward in a short arc, striking guard-deep into his opponent's armpit.

Perhaps it was an unfair trick, but this was war, not gentlemanly combat on the dueling field or in the *salle d'armes*. Every man of the guerrillas fought with a rope around his neck, and The Black Wolf was an outlaw who could ask or get no quarter. It was kill or be killed—and the devil take the hindermost.

The blood gushed from the colonel's severed axillary artery like wine from a burst bottle, and Barlow hailed a guerrilla who ran past flourishing a bloody *machete*. "Find the master-at-arms," he ordered. "We must get the keys to the dungeons—"

"I have them here, *comandante mio!*" a woman's voice, shrill with excitement, answered. "I searched among the dead and dying—"

"*Bueno*. Let us go at once," he cut in. "*Hola!*" as he dodged into a knot of struggling men and snatched a soldier by the shoulders just in time to save him from being transfixed by a saber. "If thou lovest life, friend, thou wilt show us to the dungeons!" His knife prodded through the fellow's shirt and brought a blood-stain to the cotton. "Swiftly, and no tricks, remember, or—"

"*Piedad*—be pitiful!" the captive begged. "I will lead you to the cells all quickly, *muy Señor Lobo Negro!*"

Guadalupe's little sandaled feet pattered beside Barlow as they rushed toward the dungeons. She wore a *peon's* shirt and trousers, her beautiful blue-black hair was tightly bound in a bandanna turban, and in her masculine disguise she seemed a lovely, fragile lad, but the bloodstains on her *machete* bore testimony that she had not been a mere spectator at the battle.

"José!" she cried as the key grated in the dungeon lock. "*José, corazón de mi corazón*—José, heart of my heart!"

"And is it truly thou, my dear, my love, my more-than-life?" the young man asked as he clasped her in his arms.

"Indeed, it is I, my dearest, and I am yours, all yours, till death!" she sobbed as she laid her head on his breast and broke into a fit of uncontrollable weeping.

"*Vaya!*" Barlow took the captured soldier by the arm and dragged him away. "It is a sacrilege to look on such scenes."

"YOU will not reconsider, *Señor* Barlo?" Guadalupe asked him that night as they sat beside the guerrillas' campfire. "You will not join us? The whole district is ripe for revolt, and now that we have stormed the fort and killed the tyrant Don Luis—thanks to you after God!—we have a fair chance of success. This land of ours, this California, is a Paradise. It could be heaven on earth if we could drive the tyrants out.

"Our form of government is ideal, it is our social structure that is wrong. A country composed of rich landowners and peasantry is hopelessly top-heavy. Either the great *hacendados* oppress the peasantry or the *peons* rise and slaughter the wealthy, educated classes, with the result that anarchy prevails. We need a strong middle class—merchants, self-respecting and self-supporting artisans, small farmers owning their own land and beholden to no one—such as they have in the United States. That would act as ballast for our ship of state. When we have that we shall have freedom with stability and safety, as they have in *los Estados Unitos.*"

Barlow nodded. "I think you're right there, *señorita.* The very rich man fears and despises the very poor, the very poor man hates and envies the extremely rich. The middle class stands like a bridge between the two extremes, making it possible for the poor to cross to comfort or even affluence, and preventing the rich from becoming too powerful. But how are you to raise a middle class? It will be a long time before the *peons* are ready for self-government, and meanwhile you'll have to fight the landowners and the soldiers—"

José broke in excitedly. "Not so, *muy Señor Lobo!* Already plans are laid for a Republic of California similar to the Republic of Texas. Hundreds of *Americanos* have come to this rich land over the Oregon trail these past few years. They are small farmers here as they were at home, and

chafe under the despotic rule of the great *rancheros* as much as we do. We join with them, they join with us in common cause, and *zas!* The thing is done! We win our independence as the Texans did; perhaps, a little later, we become a part of the United States, as they did. Think of it, *señor*—a great, free republic that reaches from one ocean to the other—one mighty nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all!"

Barlow was more stirred than he cared to admit. "When do you plan your uprising?" he asked casually as he lighted a fresh *cigarrito*.

José bent closer. "Listen. *Señor Lobo Negro:* Santa Ana, the ex-dictator, is in exile now, but we have positive assurance he will return in a short time. That means there will be war between Mexico and the United States. The result is foregone. Can a sparrow fight a game cock? While Santa Ana is engaged in losing the war to the *Americanos* we shall raise the standard of revolt. The victorious United States will confirm us in our independence, and—"

"You mean you'll be ready in six months or a year?"

"Perhaps six months"—José shrugged—"perhaps in a year. *Quien sabe?*"

"Good. That will give me time."

"Time, *señor?*"

"Precisely, Don José. I have been fortunate in my—shall we call them investments?—here. I have sent the profits from these—er— slightly irregular activities of mine to New York banks, and am what might be called a rich man. Now I think I'd like to go to New York for a little while to see how my agents have handled my funds After that"—he raised his shoulders in a shrug that would have done credit to a Mexican—"*quien sabe*—who knows? Your program interests me, Don José.

"Meantime, you'll need some funds to finance your campaign." He drew a slip of paper from his pocket and sketched a rough chart on it with a twig of charcoal from the fire. "Here"—he marked an X upon the chart—"is where I cached the proceeds of a little business I transacted yesterday with the guards and driver of the Yuma Linda stage. I did not have time to count carefully, but I estimate it at ten thousand *pesos*. You are very welcome to them."

He rose, took Guadalupe's hand and raised it to his lips, then shook hands with José. "*Adios, amigos,*" he climbed into the saddle and shook his bridle. "*Hasta la vista*—good-bye, my friends, until we meet again."

WELL, we all know Henry Harrison Conroy was not the accepted or expected type of Arizona sheriff. So events transpired in Wild Horse Valley. . . .

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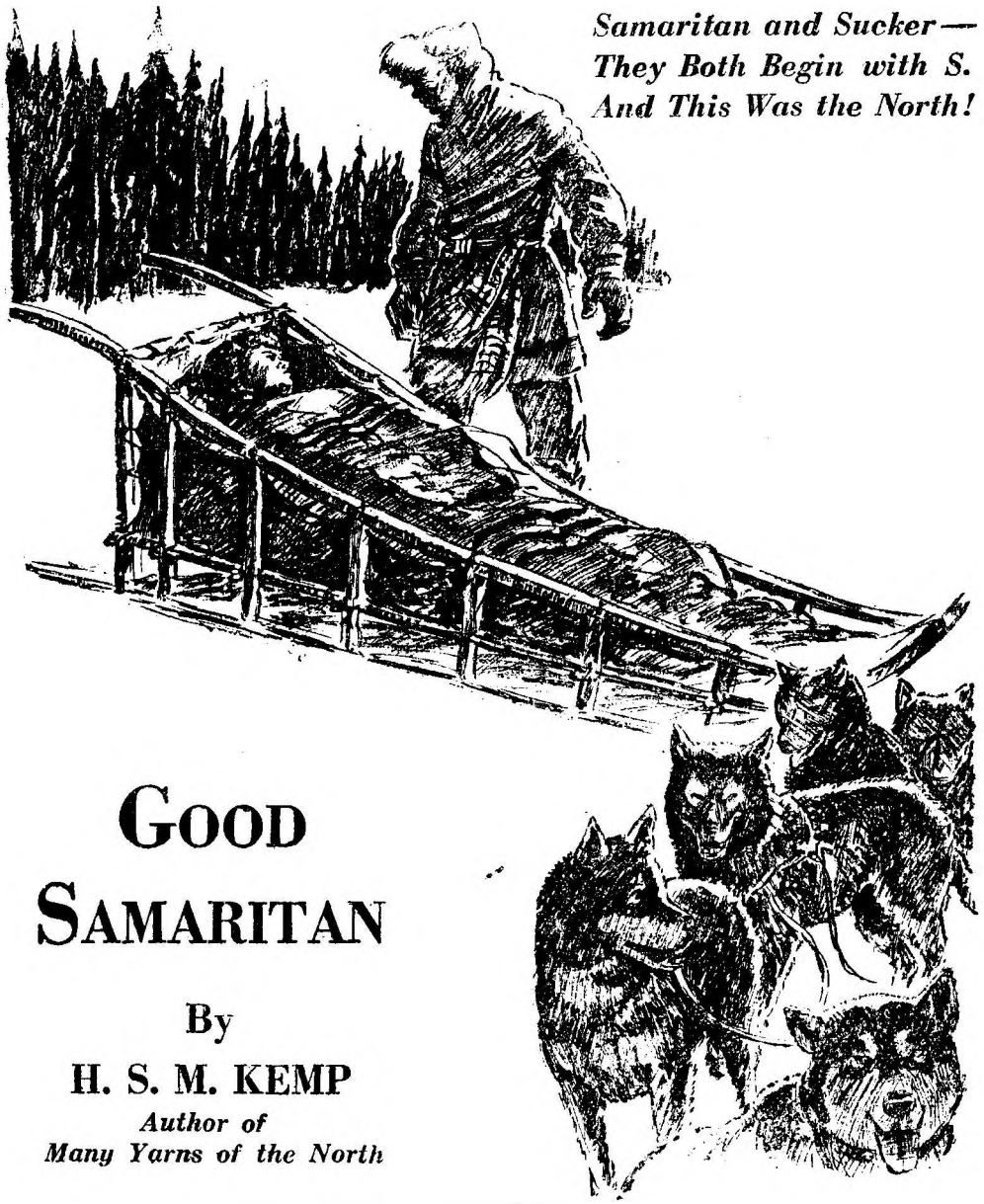


Samaritan and Sucker—
They Both Begin with S.
And This Was the North!

GOOD SAMARITAN

By

H. S. M. KEMP

Author of
Many Yarns of the North

OLD John Borden's Christmas dance at Pelican Lake had become a sort of an institution; but so had old John himself. One-time trapper, river-freighter and prospector who had made his pile, old John refused to pull out of the North when wealth had come his way; so now, with his money to back him, he was regarded as a cross between a benevolent dictator and a village squire.

At sixty, old John was pretty much the man he had always been—big, rawboned and deep-chested, a fighter who had gained success in a two-fisted sort of a way. In Pelican Lake, his word was law; and if he was pretty much of a domineering tyrant, his open-handedness and his influence made up for it all.

He liked to slap people on the back, take the Number One pew in the mission church and be looked up to generally. And the business of the Christmas dance was quite in keeping with his general character.

At this function, held in his great barn-like house, everyone was welcome. Indian, halfbreed, white man, all he needed as an invitation to the affair was a willingness to eat, whoop it up and to have a thundering good time.

Tonight was no exception to the rule. Out in the kitchen, tables bulged with provender, while in the main room four sets of square-dancers went through the intricacies of a quadrille. The home-town orchestra of three violins and an accordion put its heart into its work, and a leather-lunged trapper called the changes. Whoops, yells, the rhythmic pounding of feet, with everybody having the time of their lives. Everybody—that is with the exception of the little guy over by the door.

Shorty Anderson was the little guy, all five-foot-six of him, filled with dejected gloom. He was dressed for the occasion—new suit in place of his overalls, snappy felt hat for his old ratskin cap—but if the clothes looked festive, Shorty did not. Standing cross-legged against the wall with hands rammed in his coat-pockets, he had all the appearance of a man getting a preview of his own funeral. Only once did he smile—and it was a wan thing of a smile—and that was when a girl in one of the sets smiled over to him.

Old John Borden's Mary Lou smiled at everyone, for that was her nature, but for Shorty Anderson the smile should have had a special significance. In a clandestine sort of way and taking care to keep it from old John Borden, Shorty Anderson had looked on Mary Lou as his own particular property. In this, Mary Lou had aided and abetted him. That is, till Jerry Lakeman came along.

Jerry Lakeman was the chap dancing with her now; and Mr. Lakeman was everything that Shorty Anderson was not. He was several inches over Shorty's five-foot-six, regular-featured instead of pleasantly pug-nosed, forceful and assertive instead of easy-going and mild. In all, the sort who might make a big appeal to a girl like Mary Lou.

Shorty had danced with her a couple of times that night, but Lakeman had horned-in the moment the number was finished. And in a patronizing sort of way, as though Shorty didn't count.

Well, Shorty didn't know if he did any more. Mary Lou was as nice to him as ever and seemed to like to have him around, but stack him up against a guy like Jerry Lakeman, and Shorty was keenly aware of his general deficiency. To think of asking her to marry him, or, worse, of asking old John if he might, seemed to Shorty like something heinous. Though "ridiculous," he thought grimly, might be a better word.

Then there was their respective positions. Shorty was a trapper—a good one, though still only a trapper—while Jerry Lakeman had the prestige and standing of a manager of a trading-post. The trading-post wasn't such an elaborate affair—a two-man layout owned by a trust company in civilization—but Lakeman was an up-and-comer who could be expected to place the business definitely on the map.

Shorty sighed. The more he pondered matters the more he thought that the dance was no place for him. And he might have gone home had not at that moment Jerry Lakeman committed a psychological error. The dance-number being finished, Lakeman passed with Mary Lou; and in passing—with a "Hiyah, Runt!"—he smacked Shorty's new hat down over his face and around his ears.

Shorty heard somebody laugh and a woman giggle, but by the time he had freed himself from the hat's clutching embrace, Mary Lou and Lakeman had swung along toward the kitchen door.

SHORTY was transformed. Where before he had been the victim of an indigo melancholy, he was now hopping mad. For a moment or so he had the idea of lighting out after Lakeman and seeking bloodthirsty revenge, but a certain prudence restrained him. It wasn't the thought of the trimming he would probably take, but he shied from the idea of taking the trimming in old John Borden's house. For one thing, old John might lose any respect he held for him, and, secondly, he'd only make himself the joke of the place. Cold reason told him he hadn't lost much by it all, for small men were the butt of big men universally; but that didn't mean to say he was going to swallow his pride. All his feelings crystallized into one great resolve—he'd have a showdown with Mary Lou and find out just where he was at.

It was then that he saw her coming to-

ward him. She was alone, and there was a hint of concern in her eyes.

"Hi, Shorty! Not mad, are you? Not mad at what Jerry did?"

Shorty looked at her levelly. It wasn't hard, for she was just his own height.

"I sure *am* mad," he told her bluntly. "And I want a word with you—outside."

Mary Lou frowned. "A word with me—outside?" She suddenly seemed a trifle awkward. "But it's cold!"

Shorty glowered. "It won't take long—" Then he relented. "Well, come over here."

He steered her to a spot momentarily deserted, and there shot her a blunt question. "How's things with you and that Lakeman guy?"

Mary Lou blinked. Her frown deepened. "I—I—What d'you mean?"

"Well, put it another way," suggested Shorty. "How's things between you and me?"

Mary Lou blinked again. "All right, I guess. Aren't they?"

"Same as they ever were?"

"Certainly."

"And you'd marry me if I asked you to?"

The question seemed to floor her. "Marry you? I—I—I don't know. I suppose I would."

"Well, would you or not?" Shorty was almost brutal.

"Yes."

"Okay." Shorty nodded, turned. "I'll see you after a while."

Amazed, Mary Lou watched his resolute figure strike off through the crowd till bigger men shut him from her sight. She seemed suddenly apprehensive, but there was nothing apprehensive about Shorty himself. He found old John Borden, cigar in one hand, cup of tea in the other, talking with a grizzled halfbreed; and he promptly nailed him.

"Mr. Borden. Could I have a word with you?"

Old John, lion-maned as ever, looked down at the flushed-faced Shorty.

"Could you? Why, sure." He nodded to the halfbreed. "See you ag'in, Alex," and led the way to his private room.

There, he dropped into a huge arm-chair, set the tea-cup on a table and waved Shorty to a chair opposite.

"What's on your mind, son? Shoot."

Suddenly, Shorty's anger died as swiftly as it had risen. He gulped, wondered what the devil had got into him, felt the palms of his hands grow wet. But he had a certain resoluteness in his makeup, and having started this thing, he would definitely see it through. So he said his piece, short, and to the point.

"I want to marry your daughter. D'you mind?"

Old John took the cigar from his mouth, stared at him as he might at some sudden freak. "D'you mean," he asked Shorty curiously, "that you want to marry Mary Lou?"

Shorty gave stout answer. "Sure. And I asked if you'd mind."

Old John began to smile and his seamed face went into a network of wrinkles. "Mind? Do I mind? I dunno about that. But it's the screwiest set-up I've heard of in a year!"

Shorty's heart quit its pounding. "Well, what's screwy about it? People do get married, don't they?"

"Oh, sure," old John agreed. "Lots of 'em. I did myself, oncet. Only as the gal might say, this is the least bit sudden."

If it were sudden, Shorty thought he might as well give the old man time to get used to the idea. But John Borden soon asked him a question.

"What d'you aim to get married on?"

Shorty breathed easier. The ice was broken and now remained only the matter of talking facts.

"Well," he began; "I make pretty fair money."

"Yeah?"

"I spend it, of course—"

"And live in a trappin' camp," old John pointed out. "The gal 'ud love that, all right!"

"She could live here in the settlement."

"With you on the trapline six months of the year."

Shorty ignored the obvious. "Then in the summer I've got a good job on the boats with the navigation company—"

But old John broke in. "Sure, sure; I know. But what you got in actual money?"

Shorty frowned. This was personal stuff. And embarassing. His face showed it.

"A thousand dollars?" suggested old John. "Five hundred? Mebbe three?" Then he shook his head. "Fergit it, son. You ain't

the guy I want fer Mary Lou. You got no money worth talkin' about, no job to amount to anything, and worst of all, you got no brains."

SHORTY blinked, a bit dumbfounded. Up to a certain point he had figured old John might be handled; now he knew it meant a fight. So—

"What's that mean?" he demanded. "That crack about no brains?"

"What I said," retorted old John. "You've bin kickin' around this country six-seven years, and you're just as broke as the day you come in."

Shorty merely nodded. "Go ahead!"

"I intend to," agreed old John. "I say you're as hard up as you ever were; and why? Not because you won't work, not because you don't get the breaks, but merely because you ain't got gumption enough to look out fer yerself!" Old John seemed to wait for an expected argument; but when it didn't come he sat up in his big chair and jabbed in Shorty's direction with a thick and powerful finger. "See? You know what I mean? It's all right to make a good feller of yourself and help the other guy, but you're a sucker for every hard-luck story they tell you. Why y'are, I dunno—if it's because you like to play the Good Samaritan to the whole blamed country or because you ain't got guts enough to turn 'em down."

The color crept into Shorty's face. Old John detected it.

"Mebbe this ain't nice to hear, but as you asked me fer Mary Lou, you're entitled to know what I got ag'inst you." Old John heaved his dead cigar into the fireplace and bared his heart. "Me, I'm a hustler; and while I ain't averse to lendin' the helpin' hand where necessary, I got blamed little use fer a guy who can't look out fer Number One."

Shorty was beginning to boil. "When haven't I looked out for this Number One?"

"When?" almost roared old John. "I don't know when. All the time! What about that Rocky Rapid deal?"

For a moment, Shorty thought about the Rocky Rapid deal and knew what old John meant. But there was one of those cases where Fate laid things out for a man; where a guy had no choice but to follow a predestined course. The bare facts were simple. There had been a gold-strike made at Rocky Rapids a year or so before. Getting into the strike meant canoe-work and a long six-mile portage. Shorty was well in front of the stampeders and could have held his place had he not stumbled on the kid with the broken arm. The kid, a gangling youngster from the East, was also heading in to stake a claim; but wet moccasins and slippery rocks don't go well together. By the time they had hauled his hundred and twenty-pound pack off him, the kid found himself with this busted arm.

"So what?" demanded Shorty Anderson of old John Borden. "Was I supposed to keep on going and not bother with the kid at all? The break was a dirty one; a bit of jagged bone sticking through the flesh."

"Nothin' of the sort," retored old John. "You coulda set the arm if you wanted to and take the kid along with you. But no; you had to pack his stuff in as well as your own. Upshot was you landed at the strike too late to do either of you any good."

Shorty scowled. "I got a clear conscience out of it."

"And a torndown claim alongside the Rapid that wasn't worth the stake you cut!"

There wasn't much Shorty could say. "Well; that was one instance."

"And I'll give you another—that real strike you made up on Mooserib Lake. And what happened there? As soon as you'd got your lines run, this pardner of yours gets the colic. He's got to get to town or he'll cash in. So when the two-place Moth comes along, you let him grab the plane and you'll come out overland." Old John chuckled mirthlessly. "More sucker-stuff ag'in! By the time you hit town two weeks later, Joe Riley had sold the stakin' rights to some fly-by-night concern and you're left holdin' the bag!"

In defense, Shorty said, "That was different. Joe Riley was a crook."

"Yeah?" Old John's brow went up. "When did you find it out? And when did you find out that half the other guys you've helped, and lent money to, and gone good for generally was all a bunch o' crooks?"

"They weren't all crooks," grunted Shorty. "And I'd rather get stung once in a while than turn down a guy in genuine trouble." He tried to explain, wriggling his

shoulders helplessly. "I—I couldn't live with myself any other way."

Old John was plainly puzzled. He spat in the fireplace, grubbed in a pocket for his tobacco, shook his head. "Mebbe I was right the first time—you just can't help yourself. But still an' all, you're a poor prospect fer Mary Lou. If you had a steady job it might be all right; but a guy with a Santa Claus mania and a deckhand's salary looks like a bum bet to me." Old John stood up, and smiled as he shoved a loop of iron-grey hair from his forehead. "No, son, fergit it. C'mon and dance!"

BUT there was no more dancing for Shorty Anderson. He headed for his Pine River camp that night.

He felt depressed, utterly miserable. The parting with Mary Lou had been a somewhat damp affair, but he couldn't see how it could have been otherwise. It had been a fool's play talking to old John Borden at all. What he should have done was to run off with Mary Lou and told the old feller about it after it was all over.

But then he didn't know if that was such a bright idea. Trouble was old John had come uncomfortably close to the truth. A man should have a bit more than two-three hundred dollars when he plunged into matrimony. Or at least, a decent job. He thought of Jerry Lakeman and the job that was his. Lakeman he hated with a bitter hate; not so much for his attention to Mary Lou as the amused, patronizing manner he affected when he was with the girl and Shorty himself came along. These times Shorty felt like something out of a comic-strip, something that was always good for a laugh. It hurt his pride and lowered his self-respect. But at the same time, he envied Lakeman his job. If he had something like it—a furnished house to live in and a steady salary—the future might not have seemed so hopeless.

Then—that was it! suddenly decided Shorty. A steady job! A steady job that brought in a steady salary! He'd get one himself!

Of course, there were few jobs of any kind going around Pelican Lake but he should be able to hit something in civilization. That meant giving up the North; and while he didn't want to give up the North, it seemed to be a choice between that and giving up Mary Lou.

He toyed with the idea; pondered it to some length. And the more he pondered it, the more practical it seemed. A job would solve the problem of taking care of Mary Lou, but he'd need a house, and a set-up of furniture. Well, the house he could rent, but furniture cost money. He took mental inventory of his assets. They weren't much. He had two or three hundred dollars in the bank and he could always get rid of that Rocky Rapid claim for another couple of hundred to an adjoining mining-company who were anxious to absorb the property into their own.

"With five hundred, a feller could make a start." But five hundred dollars, five hundred dollars *only*, after seven years in the North! Shorty gave a wry grin. "Yeah, it's a mug's game, all right. I'll take a run Outside and see what's doing there."

But eating his solitary supper in the Pine River camp the following evening, he glanced through the want-ads of some fresh Northburg papers he had fetched back from Pelican Lake with him. And almost at once a boxed-in notice struck him squarely in the eye.

"Mining-men!" it said. "Attention!"

Shorty was all attention. A perusal of the notice informed him that there was a shortage of hard-rock men on the Consolidated's copper-workings on the Blackstone River and that the very best of wages would be paid those interested in filling the demand. Further, as an inducement to married men, there were a number of warmly-built cottages on the property ready for tenants. Applicants who were military-exempt should interview Mr. Clarence Brown at the Northburg Hotel not later than December the thirty-first.

Shorty recalled that this was the day after Christmas, and that meant that if he were one of those to interview Mr. Clarence Brown, he had only five days in which to get to Northburg.

"Five days." He sipped at his almost-forgotten tea and gave the matter studied thought.

This looked like a break. He wasn't exactly a hard-rock man but he knew a lot about it. Then an old abdominal operation, while not affecting him much, precluded

him from military service. And last but not least, there was something intriguing about those married men's cottages.

The Blackstone, he knew, was well down on the Mackenzie and required an air-trip to get there; but it was the steady job that old John Borden had mentioned, with the best of wages and a ready-built house thrown in.

But five days? It generally took that long to reach town by comfortable travel; and as well as this, he'd have to go around his trap-line first. He was glad that fox-trapping had finished; for the rest of his traps were close in and could all be picked up in one day. But that would only leave him four to reach Northburg.

"Could do it," he decided. "But I'd have to go straight, and not around by the settlement. That'd mean I couldn't tell Mary Lou about all this. Still, I'll write her as soon as I get the job."

WITH his traps picked up and his effects stored away in the cabin, Shorty found himself and his dogs a scant fifty miles from Northburg at ten in the morning of the thirty-first. He'd made good progress, and if he could keep it up on this his last day, he'd be in time to contact Mr. Clarence Brown and pick off one of those good-paying jobs. After that, he'd peddle what fur he had, dispose of the claim and close-out his bank account. Then he'd write to Mary Lou.

He visualized the letter: "I've got a swell job as well as a house and the price to furnish it with. Give me time to get a few dollars put away, then I'll send plane-fare and you can come in. There's bound to a J. P. around some place, and Blackstone is far enough away that Jerry Lakeman won't get in my hair any more."

Shorty grinned to himself; then, running behind the toboggan, he was suddenly aware that it was starting to snow. Snow would be bad, and by the way the clouds were drifting across the face of the sun, it looked as though there would be more of it. He remembered hearing a weather-report while in at Pelican Lake that said something about a low-pressure wave coming down from the northeast. Shorty didn't want any low-pressure stuff; what he wanted was a good trail for the balance of those fifty miles.

He was on the point of yelling at the dogs when he found they were picking up speed of their own accord. He squinted down the frozen river he was following, and was aware of some queer object a few yards from shore out on the ice. It was still a considerable distance away, but it had all the appearance of a gigantic bug lying on its back with its legs stuck helplessly in the air.

Shorty blinked, looked harder, and recognized the object as an airplane. That it was the wrong way up seemed odd, but as he drew near he observed that one of the legs was buckled out of shape. Moreover, where its partner had the regular landing-ski, this one had none.

"Boy, what a pile-up!" exclaimed Shorty. "Wonder is anyone hurt?"

His dogs sprang forward, and in a few moments they had drawn up to the stranded plane.

He squinted through the cabin windows, but though he found nobody inside, he saw a fresh toboggan-track leading from the plane and in the direction that he himself was going. There were also the tracks of dogs and a couple of men.

"Yeah," he nodded. "Someone came here after the crack-up with a string of dogs and went away with another feller. Mebbe the pilot."

As he now expected, he found the toboggan-track led to an Indian cabin a mile or so downstream. The crash of the harness-bells advertised his coming, and by the time he reached the place a couple of men were waiting for him outside. One was an Indian, the other a lean white man in windbreaker and whipcord breeches.

Shorty nodded to them both. To the white man, he said, "That your plane back there?"

"Yeah," agreed the man. "Only I don't generally set 'em down like that." He explained, tersely. "Rock under the snow. I never saw it."

The Indian re-entered the cabin. Shorty and the pilot of the ill-fated plane followed him. There, Shorty saw another man lying on a bunk in a corner. His head was bound with a bloodstained bandage, and he could have been asleep had his features not been so rigidly tense.

"The boss; Bill Kennedy," observed the

pilot. "Got knocked-out in the mix-up."

Shorty judged Bill Kennedy to be fifty or fifty-five years of age, and noticed that he was fleshly built and dressed in city clothing.

"How long's he been like that?" Shorty asked.

"Couple of hours," said the pilot. "And I'm getting worried." He explained that they had taken off from Northburg at dawn and had been forced down due to engine failure. "When we hit that rock, Bill went crash into the instrument-panel. He must have taken a dirty smack not to have come-to before this."

Shorty looked sympathetic. "And the plane—guess there's no way of righting it?"

"Not without the proper gear. And then," said the pilot, "we don't know how much she's damaged."

SHORTY considered this, then remarked that as he was hitting for town he'd be able to carry out word of the mishap. "And if Kennedy needs a doctor—and he sure looks like it—I'll have a plane come in for him right away."

The pilot nodded slowly. "Ye-ah; be all right, I guess. That is, if you couldn't take him out with you."

"With me? Haul him out?" Shorty frowned. "A big guy like him and only five dogs— Gosh, no; I wouldn't make no time at all!" He shook his head. "But this other way I can be in town by six o'clock; and once they know about it, the plane can be here in half an hour."

The pilot seemed to agree. "If, that is, it can take off."

"Take off?" scowled Shorty. "What d'you mean?"

The pilot glanced through the murky window at the murkier sky. "Dirty weather was predicted only this morning. Planes may be grounded before night."

Shorty didn't think so; said so, anyway. "Nah; won't be that bad. Real storms don't blow up that quick. Another thing," he said almost defensively, "if Kennedy's hurt as bad as he looks, bumping him around in a dog-sleigh for fifty miles won't improve his chances a lot."

"I guess so." The pilot seemed only half-convinced. "Still, if a plane can't come in, his chances'll look pretty poor here."

"It'll come in," Shorty said hearteningly; "so quit worrying. I'm on my way."

CLEAR of the cabin, Shorty breathed a sigh of relief. Had he been lucky to get out of that! Here he was, rushing to reach Northburg by a deadline and the pilot wanting to saddle him with a passenger. It was a goofy idea, anyhow. Kennedy needed a doctor, all right, but the way to get him to one was by air. And if Shorty and the dogs stepped along as they had been doing, Bill Kennedy would get his medical attention far quicker than by being hauled out overland.

And this stuff about planes being grounded. That was the berries. Like he'd told the pilot, weather bad enough to ground planes didn't blow up in half an hour. And up till half an hour ago the weather had been fine.

"I'll help anyone," Shorty told himself stoutly. "But I'm not making a good feller of myself if there's no need of it." He suddenly thought of old John Borden. Old John had called him both a Good Samaritan and a sucker.

"Mebbe a Good Samaritan," Shorty told himself grimly, "but not a sucker. Not this time, anyway."

But within a mile Shorty found himself dwelling on Bill Kennedy once more. That crack into the instrument-panel had probably done something to Bill Kennedy's skull. From the amount of blood on the bandage, the skull was probably fractured; and fracture of the skull could be mean. Involuntarily Shorty cocked an eye at the sky and snugged his parka-hood against the drive of the thickening snow. Yeah, the weather was dirty, all right, and planes might be grounded. And then came an instant and more imposing thought: What guarantee had he that he'd find a plane in Northburg at all? They might all be out, on freight-trips or something.

It was a sobering suggestion and one that both Shorty and the pilot had overlooked. If a plane wasn't there, Bill Kennedy would be in a tough jam. Lying indefinitely in an Indian shack with a skull-fracture, the man would probably die. And where would that leave Shorty Anderson?

Shorty shook himself. Well, where would it leave him? And why all the fuss? He wasn't responsible for the vagaries of the

weather and planes not being home. By hitting for town in a hurry he was doing what he considered best, and no one could cast any reflection his way.

But was he doing what he considered best? And if it was the best, why was he doing all the fretting?

Shorty suddenly yelled the dogs to a halt. "I might's well admit it," he gritted. "I'm a liar. And if anything happened to this guy Kennedy—well, I've got to live with myself for a long time yet." He swung the dogs, headed them on the back-trail. "But why is it," he blazed angrily, "that these things always have to happen to me?"

IT WAS now noon. In the cariole that Shorty had fashioned from his canvas wrapper and a crude lazy-back, lay Bill Kennedy. He was covered in Shorty's eiderdown and so far hadn't stirred. The snow fell steadily, and the trail was filling in; and though the five big huskies lunged into their collars, Shorty knew his speed had been cut down a lot. Almost forty miles to go, and but six hours to do it in. As he jogged along, Shorty bit his lip doubtfully.

"Going to keep us stepping—even if it don't snow much more."

Then, suddenly, Shorty caught a movement beneath the eiderdown. He did not stop the dogs, but running alongside, lifted a corner of it. Bill Kennedy's eyes were open, and he was looking about him wonderingly. Shorty asked:

"How you feel—better?"

But Kennedy didn't answer. With another frown of puzzlement, he dozed off again.

And Shorty frowned, too. "Wonder would he have snapped out of it if I'd left him back there in the shack?" It was a queer thought, a disturbing thought, and one that Shorty smothered quickly.

But with the passing of noon, Shorty didn't stop to eat. He grabbed a frozen hunk of bannock from the grub-box and munched it as he ran. But after a while, the run slowed to a walk. His watch showed two-thirty in the afternoon and the little lake he was crossing he knew to be a good half-day from Northburg.

Soon after three, he pulled his snowshoes from under the canvas wrapper and lashed them on; and at four o'clock it was dark. The snow was now so deep that he had to

go ahead and break a trail for the dogs; and when five o'clock came he was too all-in to travel further. There was only one thing for it—to stop, boil the kettle and eat a proper meal.

For the dogs, too, were tiring. Like himself they had had a hard and steady trip down from Pine River; and today they had been bucking snow and drifts since midmorning. So in a grove of black spruce he started a fire, thawed snow-water and fed the dogs a half-fish apiece.

The bannock and bacon he ate repaired his strength but didn't do much to lift his spirits. For he had a worry, and it was a big one. It concerned the ad in the Northburg paper and mostly that part of it referring prospective candidates to Mr. Clarence Brown not later than the "thirty-first."

Well, today was the thirty-first, but what did "thirty-first" mean? Noon? Six o'clock? Midnight? Shorty was well aware of the fact that the daily train for the south left Northburg somewhere between six and seven in the evening, and if Mr. Brown had a New Year's Day appointment in a livelier dump than Northburg, Shorty Anderson might as well throw in the towel right then. For at the present rate of travel he couldn't hope to reach Northburg much sooner than three hours after the train had left.

And then, for the second time, Bill Kennedy stirred. He seemed clearer. He said little beyond complaining of a headache, but he drank a cup of the snow-water tea and wanted to know what he was doing in a dog-sleigh out in the heart of the bush.

SHORTY told him of the crack-up, ended by saying that he'd have him in Northburg sometime that night. Kennedy nodded.

"Remember the start of that crack-up now." He moved, winced, looked closer at Shorty. "And you—what's your name?"

"Anderson. Shorty Anderson, from Pine River. Quite a piece north of here."

"Anderson." Kennedy nodded, as though trying to think. "Seems to me I know that name—Anderson."

"There's a few of us around," agreed Shorty. But it is doubtful if Kennedy had heard him; for the man dropped into what seemed to be natural sleep.

Shorty eyed him, noting the regular rise and fall of his breast.

"Yeah," he muttered. "Mebbe I've been a sucker again."

He thought so more, when seven o'clock came and ten miles out of Northburg the clouds rolled back and the stars came out. The wind freshened, swung to the north and became knife-edged.

"And planes can't take off, eh?" gritted Shorty. "And this guy was apt to die? I guess sucker's the word, all right."

Now the temperature dropped rapidly, and in the teeth of the wind the snow piled in long, hard drifts. Shorty fought the drifts ahead of the dogs. Sweat poured from his body, but his cheekbones were white half-dollars of frost. And the hour of ten was booming when Shorty's dogs turned up the river-bank trail and suddenly entered the heart of the town.

There were a few hardy night-hawks on the streets with the collars of their coats turned up. The wind whistled and store-signs creaked eerily. Shorty ran beside the toboggan. He called to Kennedy, "Awake?" And when he heard Kennedy's muffled reply, asked him, "Hospital, or the hotel?"

"Hotel, of course," snapped Kennedy. "The Northburg."

Kennedy was feeling better apparently. And Shorty recalled that the Northburg was Mr. Clarence Brown's hotel.

There, he left Kennedy in the sleigh a moment while he ran up the hotel steps. Those in the lounge stared oddly at the runt in the frost-rimmed parka. But Shorty didn't notice them. He made straight for the desk.

"Mr. Brown?" he asked. "Clarence Brown?"

The desk-clerk smiled. "Sorry, chum. Mr. Brown pulled out on the six-fifty-five."

A WEEK later, Shorty Anderson found himself back at Pelican Lake. His dogs knew where they were, for they struck straight for John Borden's big bunkhouse.

But old John must have seen them coming, for, pipe in hand and mane of hair blowing in the wintry wind, he hailed Shorty from his own veranda. "Over here, Shorty! Fire's out and the bull-cook's away. You'd best camp along with us!"

Shorty wheeled, drew up at the door, followed old John inside.

But in the big front room, old John was not alone. With him were Mary Lou and

—of all people!—Jerry Lakeman. Mary Lou gave a little squeal of delight but caught herself from rushing over to him. Jerry Lakeman nodded, with a thin smile.

It seemed to be tea-time, for each had a cup of the stuff on the table. Old John let a roar toward the kitchen. "'Nother cup for Shorty!"

Now, in the presence of Jerry Lakeman, Shorty felt that feeling of inferiority come over him again. Lakeman was in breeches, white shirt and a dollar-and-a-half tie. His hair was glossy as usual, his attitude indolent and amused. Shorty, five days on the trail without a shave, was in parka, overalls and moccasins. He felt like a tramp.

But old John didn't seem to notice it. "Where you bin, son?" he demanded. "And how come you're headin' in from the south 'stead of the north?"

Shorty took a chair, told him. "I just come back from town."

"Town?" Old John seemed puzzled. "What you bin doin' in town?"

"I tried to get a job," Shorty confessed. "A job with the Consolidated up on Blackstone River."

"You—on Blackstone River? And did you get it?"

"No," admitted Shorty. "I landed in town an hour or so too late."

Old John stared at him quizzically, and at last his seamed countenance drew into a grin. "Late ag'in, eh? Don't tell me you run into more of your Good Samaritan stuff?"

"Well—" Shorty seemed to hedge. "When this guy was hurt in the plane-crash—"

"Plane-crash?" interrupted old John. "What plane-crash? Not that one on Mosquito River?"

"Yeah."

"But how come you was mixed up in it?"

"Well, I got fed up with this country." Shorty shot a glance at Mary Lou, at an interested Jerry Lakeman. "I figured I'd sell up, clear out—" And, somehow, Shorty found himself giving old John a pretty accurate account of what had happened.

When it was finished, old John looked at him pityingly. So, in a more amused manner, did Jerry Lakeman. But it was old John who pointed out the moral.

"You say this guy Kennedy wasn't hurt

too bad? And that a plane *coulda* took off to get him?" He shook his leonine head. "I dunno, son. If somebody don't either lock you up or take you in hand, you're gonna end up on the ash-pile." He looked across at Jerry Lakeman. "What'll we do with him?"

Lakeman grinned, banteringly. "Dunno. I could do with a chore-boy. Couldn't pay him much but I'd keep an eye on him."

"You're mean—both of you!" Mary Lou broke into things hotly. "Shorty is just too good-natured, that's all. And the fact that doing good turns costs him money—"

Now Shorty broke in. "Yeah, but this was different. Seems like this feller Kennedy was taking a trip north to locate me. Neither of us knew it at the time, but if I hadn't picked him up—suppose I'd left him there, gone to town, sold out and headed for the Blackstone—it would have cost me plenty."

Old John scowled. "Then why didn't it?"

Shorty shrugged. "Well, it seems like the Aurora people want to put in a hydro proposition at Rocky Rapid, but they were slow in getting around to it. This Bill Kennedy represents an opposition outfit, and he was trying to get the jump on the Aurora people and contact me first. Only he crashed that day coming in."

Old John's scowl deepened. "Wanted to contact *you*? What the devil for?"

"Well," said Shorty again; "it seems like I had the only location that would do for a hydro site—y'know, that Rocky Rapid claim of mine. So when Bill Kennedy offered me fifteen thousand dollars for it—after he found who I was—I took it."

There was a moment's silence, then Mary Lou gave a choking little cry. Old John merely glared.

But after a while he found his voice. "You? You took fifteen thousand?"

"Sure," said Shorty. "For outright sale."

There was another pall of silence, broken only by an Indian woman bringing in a cup and saucer and a fresh pot of tea.

"Fifteen thousand dollars!" breathed old John. He stared at Shorty as though disbelieving him. "Cash money?"

"Of course."

"And you still got it?"

Shorty smiled. "Only some of it. I spent twelve thousand."

"Who with?"

"The Traders' Trust people. I bought a trading-business — the one that Lakeman looks after."

"Eh?" Lakeman's interjection was almost a bark. "You bought the business?"

"I bought her, yeah. Figured it was time I was settling down."

A change came over Lakeman. All his amused superiority and condescension had vanished. He chewed his lip, nodded in understanding. Shorty's news was a wallop for Lakeman, but after his first surprise he merely nodded coolly to Shorty and said, "That means I go down the road."

Shorty looked back at him. This is the moment he had been waiting for—when he'd have Lakeman over a barrel and hear him squeal. Well, he certainly had the guy over the barrel, but apart from a heightened color in his cheeks Lakeman gave no indication that he ever intended to squeal.

Shorty frowned. Things weren't working out according to plan, but in spite of it he suddenly found himself admiring Lakeman a lot.

He did some hasty thinking. Mebbe when you got to know him, Lakeman was all right. He was—or had been—a bit overbearing, but he was capable in his business; and starting in on a new venture as Shorty was doing, a capable man would be handy to have around. Of course, Shorty knew how old John Borden would have viewed matters. Jerry Lakeman, by his past attitude toward Shorty, had asked for all he expected to get; and if Shorty had been old John Borden, Mr. Lakeman would have been taken care of now in a two-fisted sort of way. But Shorty wasn't old John Borden, and since that Rocky Rapid deal with Bill Kennedy, old John Borden didn't worry Shorty any more. But though he felt the old-timer's eyes on him and sensed his expectancy, he spoke to Jerry Lakeman again.

"So you'll go down the road, eh? Located a better job?"

Lakeman shrugged. "No. Not yet."

"Then don't be in a hurry," grinned Shorty. "Stick around here till you do."

THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

Conducted by

PETE KUHLHOFF

Colt Metallic-Cartridge Long Guns

LAST issue we discussed the various cap and ball long guns, also the double-barrel shotguns as made by the Colt people.

The Colt Company produced their first metallic-cartridge rifle in 1870. It was the Berdan Russian Rifle and forty thousand were made. This rifle was chambered for a bottle-necked center fire cartridge of .42 caliber. The bullet weighed 370 grains and was propelled by 77 grains of black powder.

Inasmuch as the Berdan primer was used in these cartridges it might be a good idea to say a few words about this little item. It differed from the modern primer in that it contained no anvil, as it (the anvil) was a part of the cartridge case. In fact, the Berdan primer was nothing more than a small cup (somewhat larger than present day primers) which contained the priming compound. It was waterproofed and set into the opening in the base of the case.

This primer as well as the rifle itself was invented by General Hiram Berdan of the United States Army.

The breech action of these guns was a tip-up system somewhat similar to the later Springfield single-shot action. The firing pin or striker was driven by a spiral spring and was cocked by an external spur at the back of the action and had the appearance of a center-hung hammer.

Very little is known about these guns but I understand that besides the rifles and carbines made for the Russian Government a small number of target rifles were made perhaps for a Colt plant rifle club.

The overall length of the Berdan Russian Rifle was 50 inches and the barrel was 30

inches long. The cartridge was known as the .42-77-370.

The most interesting (to me) Colt long gun was the double-barrel rifle. It was made about 1880 and was chambered for the .45-70 Government cartridge. The general appearance of this gun was similar to that of the Colt hammer double-barrel shotgun. It was well made and quite accurate.

Many years ago I had the pleasure of firing one of these "side by side" rifles on the target. At this late date I don't remember the distance (it was either 50 or 75 yards) but I do remember of getting a group which measured around four inches. Ten shots

were fired, five from each barrel alternating. I wish I had that old gun now!

For some reason or other the double rifle has never been popular in this country—so naturally the Colt double rifle was soon discontinued, being manufactured for only a year or so.

The next Colt long gun was a repeater. It was the Burgess Rifle and was brought out in 1883. It was a lever action job somewhat similar to the Winchester Model of 1873. Two sizes were made, the rifle with a 25-inch barrel and the carbine with a 20-inch barrel. These guns were chambered for the .44-40 cartridge that was used in the Colt revolvers. The Burgess gun was manufactured for about a year during which time over 6,000 were made.

The famous Colt Lightning Magazine Rifle was brought out in 1885. At that time it was a new type of repeating rifle, being of slide or "trombone" action.

This slide or pump-action firearm was invented by Dr. W. H. Elliott and is the basis for the modern Remington slide-action rifle which is incidentally one of the fastest shooters of all our modern guns.

Three different types of the "Lightning" rifle was manufactured. The first series were

medium-weight rifles of .32-20, .38-40 and .44-40 calibers. A carbine was made having a 20-inch barrel, although this gun weighed only 6¼ pounds, an even lighter gun weighing an even 5½ pounds was made. A 6¾ pound sporting rifle was also made having a 26-inch barrel.

This medium-weight series was shortly followed by a smaller-caliber model with a 24-inch round or octagon barrel. These guns weighed 5¾ and 6 pounds and were chambered for the .22 short and long cartridges. In my collection I have one of these little rifles in new condition and it's a mighty fine little squirrel gun.

The heavyweight or "Express" model was brought out in 1888. These rifles had 28-inch barrels, both round and octagon, weighing 9¾ and 10 pounds respectively. A 9-pound carbine with 22-inch barrel and a "baby" carbine at 8 pounds with the same length barrel were also manufactured. These rifles were chambered for the .38-56, .40-60, .45-60, .47-75, .45-85, and .50-95 cartridges.

By 1903 the Colt Company had discontinued the manufacture of all long sporting guns, producing only hand guns, machine-guns and machine rifles. The express series was discontinued in 1895, the medium weight group in 1900 and the .22 caliber size in 1903.

We hear nothing more of the slide-action type of centerfire rifle until 1912 when the Remington Model 14 in .25 Remington, .30 Remington, .32 Remington and .35 Remington rimless rifles were brought out.

This action was developed by John Pedersen, the chap who designed the famous Pedersen Device during the World War I. This device which made an automatic of the Springfield rifle was manufactured in large quantities and would have been a complete surprise to the Germans had the War not suddenly ended.

Other Remington items, besides the Model 14 center-fire rifle, developed by Mr. Pedersen include the Model 12 rimfire, .22 pump rifle, the Model 10 pump shotgun and the Model 51 automatic pistol.

I want to repeat that the slide-action rifle is one of the handiest and fastest hunting rifles we have today—just as the hunter who uses one!

This man was taught not to drink water

Drinking water is scarce in North Africa. And what there is, is likely to be bad.

So before our soldiers landed there, they were weaned away from water. A dash of iodine in their drinking water served the double purpose of disinfecting it, and making it taste awful. By the time the boys landed in Africa, they'd lost all taste for water.

The favorite prepared drink is lemonade. Field Ration K provides it—along with veal, pork, sausage, coffee, bouillon, malted milk tablets, biscuits, chocolate and chewing gum —all in a 33-ounce pack.

Sounds like somebody was taking pretty good care of our boys, doesn't it? And that's right. American soldiers are the best-fed, best-equipped, best-cared-for in the world.

But keeping them that way takes money. So much money that Uncle Sam asks us to invest not 10% or 15% or 20%, *but all we can in War Bonds.*

Chances are, you're already in the Payroll Savings Plan—doing your bit. But don't stop there. Raise your sights! Do your *best!*

Remember, you get back $4 for every $3 you invest, when Bonds are held to maturity. But your money is needed *NOW!*

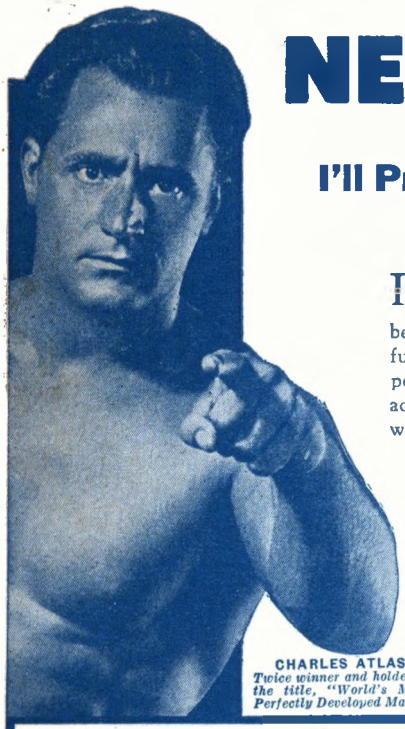
YOU'VE DONE YOUR BIT... NOW DO YOUR BEST!

BUY MORE WAR BONDS

This space is a contribution to America's all-out war effort by

THE PUBLISHER OF THIS MAGAZINE

TO MEN WHO WANT A NEW BODY—FAST!



CHARLES ATLAS
Twice winner and holder of the title, "World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

I'll Prove I Can Make You a New Man In Only 15 Minutes a Day!

IF YOU are like the thousands of men who have written to me, I know that you want a body to be proud of — one rippling with muscular strength, full of roaring energy. You want a physique that will point you out as a HE-MAN, that will draw looks of admiration wherever you go. If these are the things you want — and want FAST — then I'm the man to help you!

I myself was once a 97-lb. weakling — flat-chested, self-conscious, ashamed of my appearance. Then I discovered the secret of developing sinewy bands of muscle on every part of my body, of filling out my arms and legs, and broadening my shoulders. I changed myself into the man who has twice won the title of "World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

Dynamic Tension Makes New Men

What's my amazing method? *Dynamic Tension!* And it has shown thousands of fellows how to become New Men—new in husky, muscular body, new in health and energy. In only 15 minutes a day—right in the privacy of their own homes—they have added powerful ridges of muscle to their stomach, biceps and legs, welded their entire bodies with sinews of strength!

What My Method Will Do For You

I'll prove I can do the same for YOU! If you're frail and skinny, I'll add weight and muscle to the spots that need flesh and strength. If you're fat and flabby, I'll streamline you into a picture of well-developed, radiant manhood. I'll put smashing power into your back, make your arms and legs lithe and powerful, give you a fine, deep chest. Before I get through with you, you'll be ALL MAN!

FREE BOOK Gives Full Details

My FREE book, *"Everlasting Health and Strength,"* tells all about *Dynamic Tension*, and shows PROOF of my success in building MEN. It's packed with untouched photos of fellows who developed into Atlas Champions—with powerful muscular development and vigor. Let me prove that what I did for them I can do for YOU. For a body that will win respect and admiration, mail the coupon NOW. Don't delay. Address me personally. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 9-D, 115 East 23rd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 9-D,
115 East 23rd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"I want the proof that your system of *"Dynamic Tension"* will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, *"Everlasting Health and Strength."*

Name .....
(PLEASE PRINT OR WRITE PLAINLY)

Address .....

City ..... State .....

☐ Check here if under 16 for Booklet A

OUTGUESS THE WEATHERMAN

AMAZING FORECASTER

PREDICTS THE WEATHER 24 HOURS IN ADVANCE

READ ALL ABOUT THE "SWISS" WEATHER HOUSE AND FREE GIFT OFFER IF YOU ACT AT ONCE

NOW YOU CAN BE YOUR OWN WEATHERMAN!

Why pay $5 or $10 for a barometer when you can predict the weather yourself, at home, 8 to 24 hours in advance, with this accurate, inexpensive Weather House forecaster? It's made like a little Swiss cottage, with a thatched green roof and small green shutters. Inside the house is an old witch and a little boy and girl. When the weather's going to be fine, the little boy and girl come out in front. But when bad weather is on the way the old witch makes an appearance. There is an easy-to-read thermometer on the front of the cottage that shows you the exact temperature . . . . **Here is positively the most amazing introductory advertising offer ever made. But you must act quickly—prices may rise.**

SEND NO MONEY

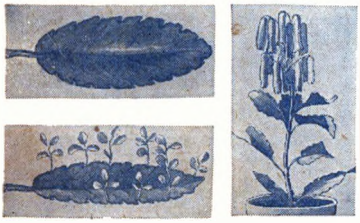
When your Weather House arrives just deposit through your Postman $1.69 (your total cost), plus postage. Then test the Weather House for accuracy. Watch it closely, see how perfectly it predicts the weather in advance, then if you don't agree it's worth many dollars more than the small cost, simply return your Weather House within 10 days and get your money back promptly.

Almost every day of your life is affected in some way by the weather, and it's such a satisfaction to have a reliable indication of what the weather will be. With the "Swiss" Weather House made in the U. S. A. and easy-to-read thermometer you have an investment in comfort and convenience for years to come. The Weather House comes to you complete and ready to use. Ideal for gifts and bridge prizes. It will bring new pleasure to everyone in your family. The price is only $1.69 C. O. D. You must act now to secure this price.

FREE for Prompt Action

Good Luck Leaf
Lives On Air Alone

The greatest novelty plant ever discovered! Tradition is—a person owning one of these plants will have much good luck and success. When planted in earth, it grows two feet tall and blooms beautifully.



Here's What Weather House Owners Say

"My neighbors now phone me to find out what the weather is going to be. We certainly think the Weather House is marvelous." Mrs. I. S., Amsterdam, Ohio.

"Please rush 6 more Weather Houses. I want to give them away as gifts. They are wonderful." Mrs. I. F., Booth Bay, Maine.

"I saw your Weather House at a friend's home and the way they raved about it, I decided to order one for myself." Mrs. L. R., Chicago, Illinois.

"Ever since I got my Weather House I've been able to plan my affairs a day ahead. It's wonderful." Mrs. D. L. B., Shenandoah, Iowa.

DOUBLE VALUE COUPON—MAIL TODAY

The Weather Man, Dept. NFA
29 East Madison Street,
Chicago, Illinois

10 DAY TRIAL OFFER

Send at once (1) "Swiss" Weather House. On arrival I will pay postman $1.69 plus postage with the understanding that the Weather House is guaranteed to work accurately. Also I can return the Weather House for any reason within 10 days and get my money back.

☐ Send C. O. D. ☐ I enclose $1.69. You Pay Postage.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....