NO EVIDENCE NEEDED — A mystery novelette — R. H. Leitfred

"The Lost Patrol"—G. A. SHAFTEL — "Jail Delivery"—OLIVER PRUDEN

Short Stories

October 25th

Twice A Month

25c

Adventure atop a remote mesa of the Southwest. . . . .

CITY OF THE NOT SO DEAD

by

Gordon Keyne

WHEN INFECTION IS PRESENT

Get After the Germs

That's what Listerine Antiseptic does—kills millions on scalp and hair.

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Me and Buck were having an argument about them flakes and scales on my jumper. "Listen," says he, "I'm laying my month's pay that if you'll take my advice, you'll get help—pronto!"

I took the bet.

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Soon's we got our Listerine Antiseptic, I went to work and kept going! Buck was right. Holy Smoke! Could I see an improvement!

Listerine Antiseptic and massage really got after those flakes and scales, eased up that itching. The old scalp and hair felt like a million—looked swell! Glad I lost that bet! Buck took the dough and we made liberty together. Good guy, Buck!

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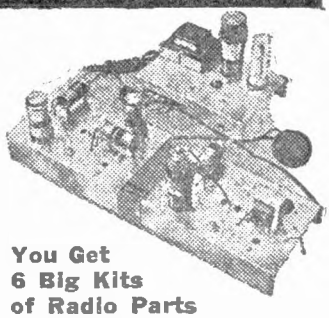

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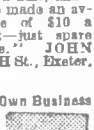

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CONTENTS

SHORT STORIES issued semi-monthly by SHORT STORIES, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City 20, N. Y., and entered as second class matter, November 24, 1937, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION PRICE in the United States, American Possessions, Mexico and South America, $5.00 per year; to Canada, $6.50; and to all other countries, $6.60. Price payable in advance. October 25, 1941. Vol. CLXXXIX, No. 2. Whole Number 932.

WILLIAM J. DELANEY, *President and Treasurer.*
M. DELANEY, *Secretary.*

D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.*
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BIGGEST AND BEST—TWICE A MONTH

Stories

latest stories—no reprints

OCTOBER 25th, 1944

COVER—Benton Clark

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

The Story Tellers' Circle

North and South Forever

MANLY WADE WELLMAN, who likes to talk of Civil War history, has written a yarn of those days—"Cannon in Front of Them"—in this issue that is more truth than fancy.

Today, when all sections of America share alike—both in sacrifices and in devotion to country and respect for each other—it is strange to contemplate the tragic 1860's and the War between the States.

Yet even then there were men of the North and South who stood side by side against a common menace, foreshadowing the days to come when the United States would become the great, unified nation it now is.

Mr. Wellman tells us:

"There's a surprising lot of truth in this story. Of course, I am not aware that the Minnesota frontier had a fort called Fort Lowery, nor to my knowledge was any of the personnel in that time and district named Caldecott, Rovelle, Graham, or Rikesaw. But the Sioux did uprise under Little Crow in August of 1862; they did tear up the whole western Minnesota frontier and almost obliterate it, and Governor Sibley did have his hands full putting the uprising down. What I say happened at Fort Lowery happened, in fact—complete with old cannon and amateur gunners—at one of the Forts that was within less than a hair of falling to the Indians. Read these things in official Union Army records, or in comprehensive histories of the time and place. For all I can prove to the contrary, my story is completely true.

"It is good to remember that, even while Lee and McClellan were going 'round and 'round in Northern and Southern Maryland in the late summer of 1862, adherents of Union and Confederacy found it worth while fighting side by side against a savage menace. I myself descend from a Confederate officer on my father's side and a Yankee cavalry sergeant on my mother's. When it comes to that, I have more than a bit of sympathy for the Sioux, too, a decent bunch of savage patriots fighting for what they thought was right and just. This kind of story is hard to write without a bit of preaching; because it's so happily true that the fighting of the 'sixties got the family quarrels of North and South and Indians out of our blood, so that we are able now to combine peerlessly against insufferable foreign strangers.

"From what I can learn, here is the way a frontier fort looked and behaved at the time; and my account of how the guns of Fort Lowery were served and handled may be checked against description of actions and orders in a good standard artillery manual of the 'fifties—written by none other than Major Robert Anderson, who gamely and futilely defended Fort Sumter in April of 1861. As to the conversations, if they sound stilted and archaic—that's the way our grandparents and great-grandparents talked among themselves.

"They were swell people, and I'm glad they had us for grandchildren and great-grandchildren."

Manly Wade Wellman.

More Evidence

ROBERT H. LEITFRED sends along some "evidence" on his yarn in this number of SHORT STORIES, and it's of the non-circumstantial strictly interesting type.

Writes the author of "No Evidence Needed":

"As all readers of SHORT STORIES know, wars are fought by three distinct groups: Political representatives, by combat forces on land, sea and in the air, and by an inner circle of fighters using various types of destruction known as sabotage. This is a story of sabotage centered around—but let's begin at its inception.

"Back in 1915 the German Supreme Command wired to Berlin the following message: 'WE ARE AT OUR WITS' END TO DEFEND OURSELVES AGAINST AMERICAN AMMUNITION.'

"Why the complaint against American ammunition being fired in huge quantities from French, British and Russian guns? Well, the answer goes back to Yankee in-

(*Continued on page* 139)

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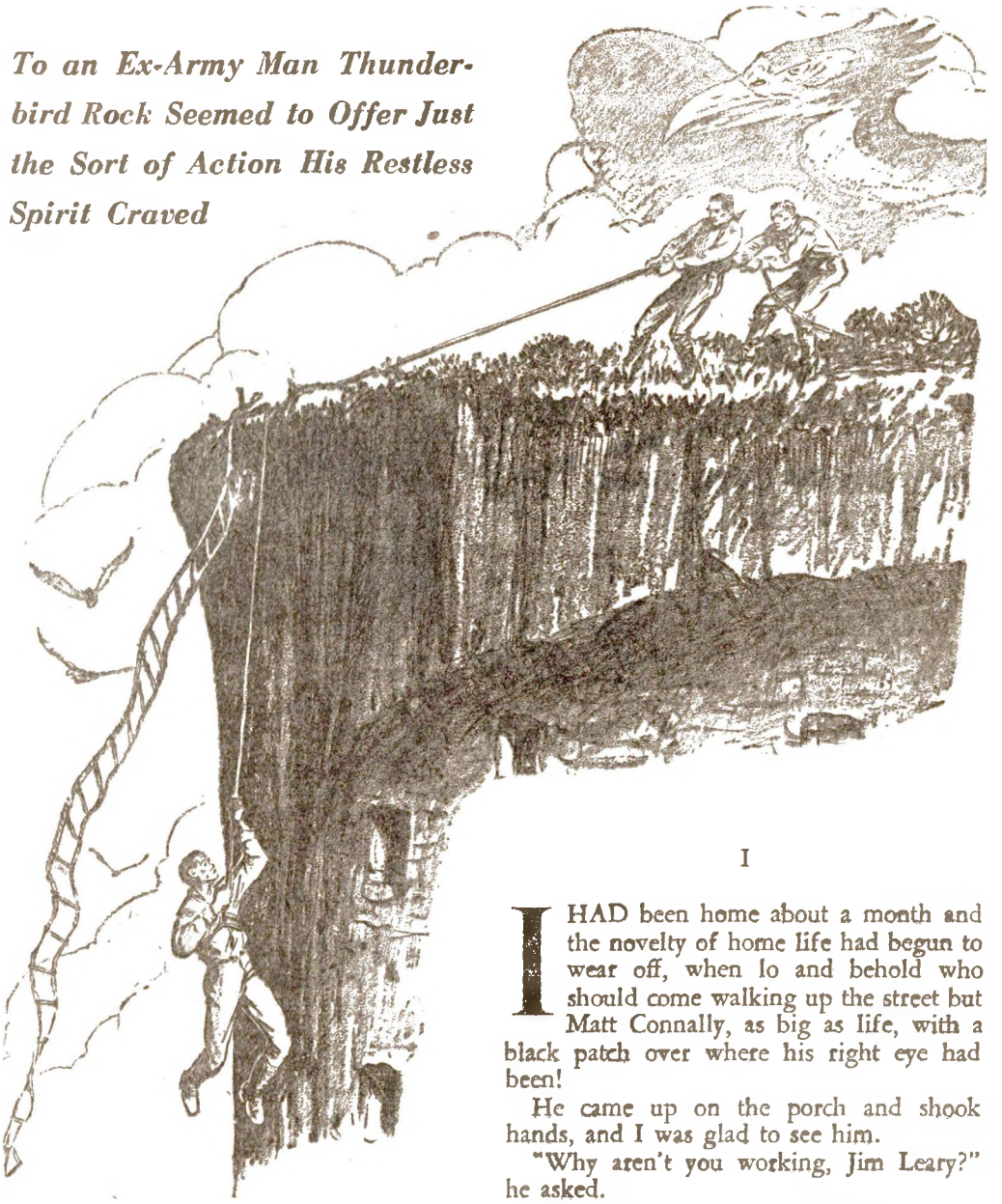
To an Ex-Army Man Thunderbird Rock Seemed to Offer Just the Sort of Action His Restless Spirit Craved



By GORDON KEYNE

Author of "General Repair Men," etc.

I

I HAD been home about a month and the novelty of home life had begun to wear off, when lo and behold who should come walking up the street but Matt Connally, as big as life, with a black patch over where his right eye had been!

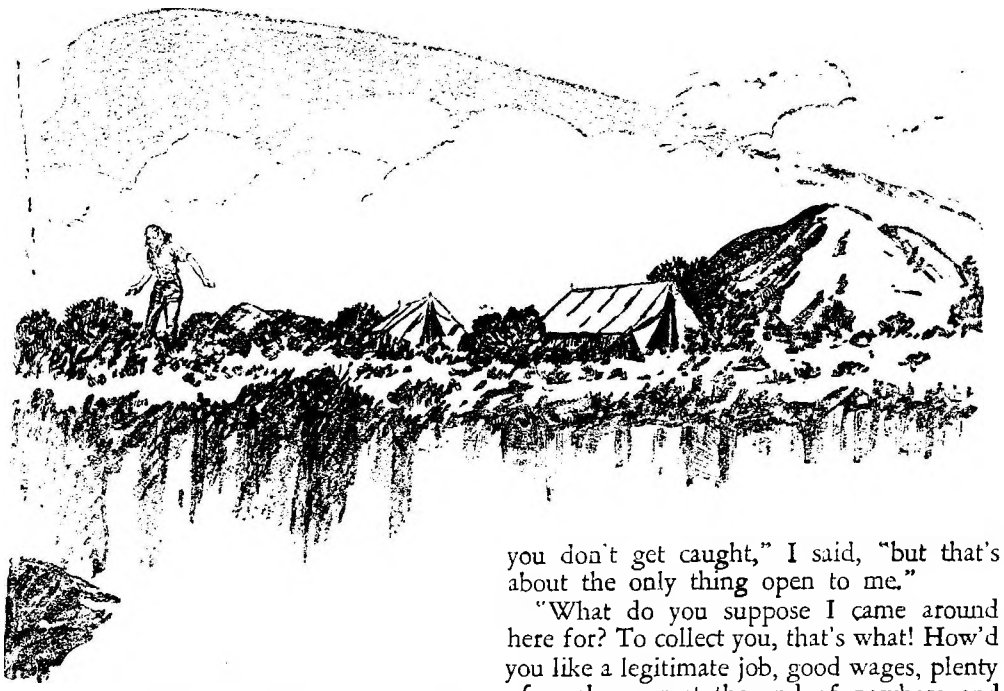
He came up on the porch and shook hands, and I was glad to see him.

"Why aren't you working, Jim Leary?" he asked.

"No job," I told him. "My lungs are on the bum, account that picric acid gas and fumes I filled up on in that Cassino cellar. I almost wish I hadn't got a disability discharge at all. What you doing here in Oklahoma City?"

"Looking for you," said he. "You're looking okay, Leary. Homesick for the army?"

NOT SO DEAD



"Don't make me laugh," I said. "My folks are doing all right, but they'd do better without me. The medicos say I might cure up if I could live six or seven thousand feet high, but what chance have I for that? A blasted tourist out in Colorado or Arizona —huh! Not on my bankroll."

"And you're just a blight on the family, is that it?"

"You needn't rub it in," I told him.

He smothered a grin. "I know how you feel. I went back home with my one good eye and was a hero for a week or so. Then my girl went sour on me and things went wrong and finally I skipped out."

That was likely to happen with Matt Connally. I had got on fine with him in Africa and in Italy; he pulled his weight and then some. With this black eye-patch he looked like a pirate. But I noticed he had on good clothes.

"You look prosperous," I said, and he gave me a sidelong look.

"So could you, Jim Leary, if you had a mind."

"Well, there's a future in bootlegging if you don't get caught," I said, "but that's about the only thing open to me."

"What do you suppose I came around here for? To collect you, that's what! How'd you like a legitimate job, good wages, plenty of work, over at the end of nowhere and seven to eight thousand foot altitude?"

"Don't joke, Matt," I said. "I wouldn't like it for a joke."

"Why, you solemn-faced monkey! You've got education and I haven't; but I've got a job and you haven't," said he. "Would I joke about it? Now look. I'm at the Cimarron House with Professor Howard. He's no G. I. Joe either but just loose from a government job and raring to go places. He's a scientist and invented a lot of the gimcracks and gimmicks we used in the Army; he's a right guy, too. Come on downtown and see him, because the job's waiting and we're off in the morning for the great southwest."

It was like a dream, to anyone down and out as I was, feeling done with life at twenty-six, and no kidding either.

Matt had come out of the oil fields to go into the army. He was plenty rough, but he had sense. I think he had taken a sneaking liking to me because I was a useless sort of guy with a couple of college degrees and nothing else, and I had helped him out when he got into M. P. trouble in North Africa. He had his faults, of course. So did I. It

did not occur to either of us that, once out of the army altogether, we might not get on so well.

I WENT downtown with him as quickly as I could get dressed, and interviewed the professor. Howard was in his early fifties—a pleasant, good-looking man, smart as a whip. Before the war he had been an expert, and still was, on the ethnology of the southwest. In other words he knew all about the Indians, ancient and modern, from cliff-dwellers to Apaches. He was no dreamer; he had a hard, business-like streak in him.

"I'll be frank with you, Leary," said he. "I'm undertaking a private expedition, or rather search, in the southwest. Ever hear of Thunderbird Rock?"

"No," I said, truthfully.

"It's an isolated mesa in the most desolate part of the Painted Desert, supposedly never explored for the excellent reason that no one can climb the steep cliffs surrounding it. Also, because there's no reason to try. The Indians avoid it for superstitious reasons. Whites have too much sense to waste time on it. Aerial surveys show that the top must be watered, since it has some trees. But there's some reason to think," he went on slowly, "that of late years, at least, it has been inhabited."

"Either it is or it is not," I observed. "Common sense would tell you so. The matter of food is one thing; another, roads or trails to the top. Even in the desert, such a place can't be inhabited without people knowing of it."

"Correct," he agreed. "The case has some highly puzzling features. There are two possibilities. First, that some remnant of ancient cliff-dwelling people still exists there. This is unlikely in the extreme, but possible. Second, that the inaccessible place is being used by someone as a hideout—Japanese, criminals, anyone!"

"That," I said, "seems even less likely. May I ask what reason there is to think the top of this mesa is inhabited?"

He gave me a sharp look and nodded, as though pleased by the question.

"Little things, none conclusive. Twice it has been reported that lights were seen on the mesa at night. And last year an old desert rat, going by, found a freshly emptied Argentine meat tin lying under the cliffs, with no sign to indicate anyone had passed that way; the surmise was that it had been chucked off the top. Naturally," he added apologetically, "all that is no evidence for the theory. I have another reason for going there."

"What?" I asked.

"Cliff dwellings. Several years ago I passed there in a plane, circled the mesa, and saw what looked like cliff dwellings close to the top. I kept quiet about it, hoping to go and explore for myself some day, but the war intervened. Now the time has come."

"How do you expect to reach the top?"

"Tell me first if you want the job."

"It's in the bag, Professor. I can't stand much hard work now, but my lungs should improve at that altitude."

"Seven thousand, yes. Okay; it's a deal. We leave here by tonight's train, and meet my daughter, Nesta, in Albuquerque. She's arranging there to hire a plane which will take us and a load of supplies to the mesa and land us on the flat top. If we find no water there, we'll have to leave within a few days—the plane will return to see. If we find water, we can remain indefinitely. I've secured permission to take along a small portable short-wave radio for essential communication."

Professor Howard knew his business; he had neglected nothing. He was operating on his own funds, and evidently had plenty of the necessary, but if he made any cliff-dwelling finds on the mesa he had a museum all ready to chip in on the expenses. For all his amiable ways, he was as canny as any Scot.

We settled wages, which were generous, and parted to meet again at the train. I had seen nothing of Matt since reaching the hotel.

I went home, reported to my sister and her folks, and packed up. We got an early supper, so I could have a last meal with them before train-time. While we were at the table, the phone rang. It was a call for me, so I answered, and heard a strange voice—a peculiar nasal voice, almost with a whine to it, but deep and strong.

"Leary?" it said. "You know where Matt Connally is?"

"No. Why?"

"This is a friend of his, Pete Brennan. I

want to locate him before he leaves town and can't."

Naturally, I was not helping him out even if I could. Chances were Matt was in trouble and I was not giving away his train-time.

"Sorry," I said. "I might see him tomorrow if you want me to give him any message."

"Okay, feller," came the reply. "Tell him that I'll be seeing him and he'd better behave. That's all. Got my name?"

"Yes, Pete Brennan," I said, and he rang off.

Thinks I, it's a good thing I did not open my mouth too wide. Matt's in a jam, and it's going to be a long while before Pete Brennan is seeing him.

I got down to the station in good time, and met Howard and Connally. The train was late, and while we waited I took a walk outside with Connally.

"So you've got friends in town," I said.

He gave me a quick look. "Not a soul, except you," said he. "What d'you mean?"

"Then it must have been some mistake, about Pete Brennan."

He stopped short. "For gosh sake! Spit it out quick, will you?"

I gave him the message. For a minute he said nothing, then flipped away his cigarette.

"Did you tell him?" he asked finally.

"Naturally not. I figured you might be in a jam."

"You're a square guy, Leary. I owe Brennan some money and he's been after me. Got a collection agency on my trail and I've been ducking them. Once this train pulls out, the hell with him!"

He thought this explained everything, but it did not. He had told me too much about himself, in other days. He came from the west coast, his folks lived out there; he had been married and divorced just before the war, he had not been in Oklahoma City before stopping over here with the professor to collect me. Brennan—collection agency—pfui!

I said nothing to him of any doubts, however. It was his affair, not mine, and if he wanted to cover up the business that was his privilege. Or so I thought at the moment. Our train came in and we got off without incident.

Howard had received a wire from his daughter that everything was ready, and this delighted him, because while the war was over for us, it was not over as a war, and to get a plane had taken all his influence, even for a short one-day trip. He said nothing about the location of the mesa, except that it was a short distance by plane and a cursed long one by car, being far from any highway. A plane at two hundred miles an hour can dig a deep hole in any map.

As we talked, before turning in, Howard made it clear there was nothing secret about our trip. Neither was it of any interest to others, being unimportant except to him. His daughter had been his assistant in his work, he mentioned in passing; I took for granted that she was a sort of she-man, by the way he spoke of her capability. She had been in war work too, until things eased up in Europe and the scramble to get back into civvies began.

According to Howard, we would not lay over in Albuquerque at all—go direct to the air field and the plane would be ready. Nice work if it were true, I thought. If his cross-eyed old maid of a daughter could have everything shipshape for a party of three to take off, she would be good.

It had never occurred to me that she might be going along with us. So, when we pulled into Albuquerque next day and piled off the train, there were all kinds of surprises lined up and waiting for Jim Leary. Not to mention one for Matt Connally and his black eye-patch.

II

NESTA HOWARD was waiting for us at the station. She wore pants, all right; I suppose they were slacks, if that means something different. She was a tall, trim figure in khaki, with black hair and eyes and a hard handshake. She had a square, level look and a dimple in her cheek, and was not at all mannish.

I could not figure her out then nor for quite a while afterward, and got the shock of my life when I did.

Anyhow, she was capable as all getout, and had a bus waiting to take us to the airport. We were all collected except Connally, and then I saw him off by himself talking with a man. A short, squat man who looked something like a Mexican but was not. From their looks I thought a blow-

off was on hand, so I excused myself from the Howards and started toward the pair.

Connally saw me coming. He hastily shook hands with his friend and came to meet me, muttering cuss words under his breath

"Pete Brennan again?" I said.

His one eye looked murder at me. "No. Worse," he said. "Come on, let's go."

That was all he would say, then or later. We hit out for the airfield. Miss Howard gave the professor some mail, looked us over, and said the plane was warmed up and waiting. All supplies were aboard. I judged she was about twenty-five. She wore no makeup and had few feminine frills; her voice was deep and husky and pleasant to hear, and she seemed to be more muscle than bulge; if you know what I mean.

If any of the old explorers hang around earth today and see how things are done, it must make their eyes pop. What would have taken the Spaniards who discovered this country long weeks and months, we did in a matter of hours; and it was much better done, too. Nesta had hired an old transport plane and a good pilot. We hardly saw him, but the ship had room for everything and to spare, and when we came to go aboard, I shook hands with Nesta.

"What's that for?" she asked.

"Saying good-by," I said.

She laughed. "What? Don't you figure that I'm one of the party?"

I had not, and neither had Matt Connally. Before I recovered from my confusion, we took off. Going on such a trip—with a woman! Matt growled curses under his breath, and Nesta sat with her father, not exactly laughing at us but giving us an amused look now and then as though enjoying my blunder. We were off to a bad start, looked like. And I felt awkward and ill at ease.

Howard, map in hand, was watching the country below us, and Nesta came over and sat down beside me.

"Cheer up," she said, a laugh in her black eyes. "It's no more than a camping trip at the end of nowhere, so you can put up with a woman for a few days."

"It just took me by surprise," I said, then I fell to laughing and the awkwardness passed. We began to get acquainted and I decided she was a person to like. When she found that Matt and I had been in Italy, she thawed quite a bit and said to cut out formality.

"Dad isn't a professor, but you call him that and he likes it, so keep on," said she. "Otherwise stick to first names, Jim, and let's have no foolishness. Hard work ahead."

I doubted it; camping out did not strike me as hard work.

We were in the air more than two hours. Suddenly the professor let out a yip, and our destination was in sight. We were all excited as we watched it draw near—a huge chunk of rock looming up out of the desert. Howard passed around his binoculars. That mesa was half a mile long, and nearly as much wide, with rock walls that went straight down and bent in a trifle so that the top overhung them like a mushroom its stem, only not so much. It was obvious why the place had never been climbed.

As we got closer and drew above it, the mesa top showed up clearly. In some places it was badly eroded and weathered, like the desert floor around, but there were several flat spots where a landing looked entirely possible. Just the same it was going to be a tricky piece of work. The pilot took no chances but circled closely and picked out a flat spot at the west end, where there was some brush but no rocks. A good many small trees appeared in the rougher ground at the eastern side of the mesa, and here too was a little point of rocks like a small peak sticking up.

The selected landing, however, looked entirely feasible, and was almost as good as a runway made to order. We came down, bounced, and then the brakes took hold and we drew to a stop. The pilot appeared, grinning and highly pleased with himself, and we tumbled out to make fast.

So there we were, high and dry, with a job of unloading ahead and camp to make.

IT WAS a joy to see how that girl had arranged the supplies—no confusion, everything labeled and shipshape. She pitched in with us and did a man's work. We emptied the plane in jig time, while Howard took it into his head to settle the water situation at once, if possible. He disappeared along the mesa, and came back to us beaming.

"You needn't return tomorrow," he told

the pilot. "There's water, all right—a small spring, and plenty for us. Make your return two weeks from today. Circle and we'll give you a buzz with the short-wave outfit. Okay?"

"Okay," said the pilot, and shook hands. "Good luck to you! Ready with the chocks, boys—"

Five minutes later he was gone, and we were on our own.

Our first job was to move everything to the spring Howard had located, more or less at the center of the mesa and just below the little point of rocks. A good deal of brush grew about here, sage and greasewood, which had to be cleared before we could set up our two tents and make camp. Even with four of us working at it, this took the rest of the day; it was no easy matter getting the supplies moved, over rugged ground, and latrines dug.

I could do my share with ease, and felt like a new man here. The altitude, the hot sun and brisk wind, the crisp thin air, were intoxicating. Oddly enough, Matt Connally was the one to make the hardest weather of it, for he overdid and had to reckon with the altitude. I asked him no questions about the man who had met him at the station, and he volunteered nothing. We were in a different world now.

The spring was a small one that trickled into a stone basin it must have made for itself across the centuries, but was sufficient for our needs. We made no effort to do any exploring; when sunset came we were all dead beat. The whole eastern part of the mesa was bad ground—lumpy, eroded rock overgrown with scattered piñon trees, brush and small cactus. We saw no rattlers, however.

With some gunnysacks and bits of boxes, Howard fashioned a desert cooler a bit below the spring, ran a length of tiny plastic piping to it to drip water, and our fresh supplies were in shape to keep. The professor knew his way around in this country.

He and Nesta had one tent, Matt Connally and I the other. The night was cold, the stars burned like lamps, and on the desert far below us shrilled the queerly insane howling of coyotes. The moon was coming to its full, but I was snoring too hard to care about such matters. I did not wake up till the sun hit in on my face.

"Now for business," said Howard, when we sat at breakfast. "We've seen nobody, but that proves nothing. The supposed cliff-dwelling indications are under the east and southeast rim of the mesa, sheltered from the prevailing winds of winter. There's a direct overhang above the desert at that point. I'm to be the only one to explore the edge there, and only when we're all together with ropes attached; that's a standing order."

"Understood," said Connally. "One reason you hired me and Leary was because we both weren't afraid of cooking, Professor. Better settle that, first thing."

"Take turns," Howard replied. "You take the job today, Matt; Nesta tomorrow, Leary the day after—fair enough?"

So arranged. Connally was glad enough to stay quiet for the day and get accustomed to the altitude. For the rest of us, the professor laid out the morning's work—to cover the top of the mesa on this rough eastern side, go over it carefully, look for any sign of life or occupation, and to keep away from the edge. No need to tell me that; the idea of dropping off that rim without a parachute gave me a shiver.

We set out, all three of us, quartering that accursed thorny ground, and I was looking for rattlers rather than for cliff-dwellers. Apparently there was no living thing on the mesa, except ourselves. We separated, each taking a sector of the rough ground, and my portion was not only eroded grotesquely but full of holes and pits to boot.

In this solitude between heaven and earth, but with no ladder either way, it was easy to dream about fanciful descendants of lost Indian tribes. I had worked fairly close to the south rim without finding anything when I came upon a long hollow among the broken rocks. A gray, dead skeleton of tumbleweed was wedged between two of the rocks. Something odd about it caught my eye and I approached it.

About the stem was caught and wound a piece of heavy white string.

The implication was startling enough, but there was more. In among the rocks, half covered by brush and cactus, was a long, straight shape. I had to look more closely before I could realize that it was a twenty-foot beam—a long, stout six-by-six, warped and grain-roughened and weathered a dead

gray color. Attached to one end was an iron pulley, whose wheel was rusted fast in place.

I let out a yell that drew Howard and Nesta. Aside from a few arrowheads they had discovered nothing; but when I pointed out my finds, they both stood staring and silent, Howard looking keenly interested rather than disappointed.

"So we're not the first whites here!" said he. "The string looks rather gray, the beam old, the iron rusty—but you can never tell about things here. One season of hot sun and one winter of rains might have this effect."

"And that is certainly a pulley, or was," said Nesta. "Which means only one thing. Come along, let's look toward the edge! And be careful. Give us your hand, Dad! Any footprints would remain a long time here—keep your eye open for any, Jim."

Footprints there were none. But within twenty minutes we turned up something else, on the very edge of the chasm—so much so that we dared not approach closely. Here were two immense beams bolted together and parallel with the edge. They looked old, too.

"Well, somebody was here who had sense," I said, and lighted a cigarette. "Right here there's an overhang. With a rope and a pulley, anyone could bring up whatever was desired from the desert below, with mighty little labor. Did your cliff-dwellers do that, Professor?"

"No," said Howard, with a slight smile. "Hm! This is curious, all right. But if someone hid away up here, why didn't he leave any other sign of his existence?"

"He did," said Nesta calmly. "When Leary called us over here, I had just found a pit filled with tins and rubbish. Some looked old, some fairly new.

"Show me the pit, my dear," Howard ordered.

They went off together. It was getting on toward noon, so I went back to camp, gave Matt a hand with the work, and told him of our find. He stared at me for a moment, then went on fixing up the folding table.

"Aren't you excited about it?" I demanded.

He grunted. "Not a durned bit. All that would excite me is finding an Injun—alive. Plenty dead ones, I reckon."

"Who said so?"

He shut up like a clam, and that left me mighty curious. For, as I turned it all over in my mind, it began to dawn on me that Matt Connally must know something about Thunderbird Rock that he was not telling.

It was a better shot in the dark than I dreamed.

III

"HOW did your dad get hold of Connally?" I asked Nesta.

We were off covering the rest of the ground, while the professor was trying to get some line on the possible age of what had been discovered.

"He advertised for someone to go with us," she said.

"Did he mention this place by name?"

"Yes. It was no secret. Why?"

"Oh, just curious," I replied. "When are we going to look for cliff-dwellings?"

"Tomorrow, probably. They wouldn't be here on top, but down the side. Arrowheads and water make it pretty certain we'll find some."

"You mean those Indians would have lived up here like squirrels?"

She laughed. "Yes, Not recently. Perhaps thousands of years ago, when the desert below was an ocean. We may make some very remarkable discoveries here."

"If you do, you probably will," I said drily. "Smoke?"

"No thanks, I don't."

We found nothing more. The professor announced at supper that he figured the beams and pulley must be a good ten years old, maybe more, but some of the empty food tins looked much more recent. I could have reached the same conclusion without wasting so much time. He and I and Connally were going to attack the cliff-dwelling problem next morning with ropes.

During the day we had gathered a big lot of brush and small wood, to save using up our alcohol stove. We turned in early and slept like logs—at least I did, until something wakened me and I found the moon high and white. I eased out of the tent, leaving Connally snoring, and went to the spring for a drink. The can of peaches was gone.

Nesta had put it there herself, last thing,

in the water-basin, so the peaches would be cold for breakfast; that spring was cold as ice. Now the can was not there or anywhere around. I studied over this mystery, then the spell of the clear moonlight got me and I wandered off a little way and sat down, enjoying the beauty of the night. Perhaps I dozed, because all of a sudden I came wide awake.

For two reasons. First, I caught a faint sniff of wood smoke, then another one. And second, I saw someone moving over the rough ground—a figure all white in the moonlight.

My first reaction was panic; I thought it was a ghost, sure. It was silent and swift, and abruptly vanished. It did not come again. Then I smelled the wood smoke once more. We had not burned any wood. This was distinct, and it was real. A ghost? Not much. But what, then?

I waited. The figure did not come again; I began to think I must have imagined it, and went back to camp. Matt was snoring away. I listened at the other tent—and out came Nesta with a pistol in her hand.

"Oh, it's you!" she exclaimed. "I thought I heard someone prowling."

"So did I, and there was," I returned. "Those peaches are gone."

"What peaches—oh! Gone?"

She went to look for herself. I said nothing about having seen anyone—it seemed too ridiculous. No one else appeared. We sat and talked for a bit, and she asked if I had ever heard of a Captain Xavier Elkins in Italy. The name startled me and I answered before I thought.

"Oh, sure! I helped bury him. A personnel mine got him, going up from Cassino. Did you know him?"

She shivered, and I could have kicked myself. But her voice came steadily.

"Yes, I knew him. That's why I'm going into a convent, when Dad has no more need of me. I think this moonlight has bewitched us all. Good night."

She went back into the tent and I went into mine. Convent! That was why she seemed sort of out of the world. And how casually I had uncovered her tragedy! I fell asleep still kicking myself, mentally.

Next morning, everyone blamed everyone else for swiping the can of peaches; then the subject lapsed by agreement, as an unsolved mystery. Howard got out his ropes and a stout rope-ladder he had fetched along, and with Connally we went off to the eastern edge of the mesa to explore. According to him, any cliff-dwellings should be just under the rim in a weathered stratum of the rock. I asked why the aborigines would not have lived on top, and he had a whole string of reasons why not, but none of them made much sense to me.

With Matt and me holding a rope tied around his waist, Howard went to the very edge and worked his way along it. Half an hour of this, and he was glad to quit and rejoin us. None the less, he was jubilant, for he had settled the question of cliff-dwellings.

"I knew I was right!" he exclaimed, as we knocked off for a smoke. "There are very distinct evidences of a path there, or rather foot-holes, going down the outside rim."

"And you're going down them?" I asked. He smiled and shook his head.

"Not much. The path has been broken off or weathered away, I'm not sure which. It no longer exists. Luckily, I prepared for just such an emergency. We'll put over the rope-ladder and peg it securely, then I'll go down it—held by a rope. It means you'll have to haul, probably—"

"Then why not let me do it?" I said. "You must weigh close to two hundred. Connally the same. I'm skinny, and tip the beam at a hundred and forty. Why not let me take a look and make sure? It'll save work."

This made sense, and it was so decided.

The job was by no means so easy as it sounded. Getting the rope-ladder pegged securely in place, so it dangled down some thirty feet, was a task in itself. After that the ropes had to be affixed to me in such a way as to permit me to dangle if necessary without leaving me half dead. The professor was an adept at all this, however, and finally I was ready for the attempt.

The lip of rock here was soft and treacherous and at one time must have been much wider than it now was. Getting over the edge and down on that ladder would have been quite impossible without the ropes made fast to me; the other two could not go very close to the edge, and had to lower me away until I could get placed on the ladder.

At first, naturally, all I could think about

was Jim Leary and the fix he had been fool enough to get himself into. I caught sight of the desert down below, hundreds of feet, and for a minute all I could do was hang on and swallow hard. I could not see the two above, nor could they see me.

"Take your time," came Howard's voice, encouragingly. "Tell us when to lower away."

I told them, they lowered, and I got down a couple more rungs on the ladder. Then I shut my eyes and clung again, because there was a breeze and that rope-ladder swayed with the breeze, and the world down below swayed too, and I felt like being seasick.

I crawled on down a spell and be damned if I would have any more of it. So I opened my eyes and looked at the rock wall facing me. I was hanging out about ten feet away from it, like a swinging pendulum. Squarely facing me was a line of little openings in the rock, with a path in front of them. Cliff dwellings, sure enough!

Then I saw something move—something white, in the opening opposite me. My heart jumped. There was nothing visible—nothing! But something had moved. I clung tight and stared.

"Please!" came a voice. "Please don't!"

It came from the opposite hollow in the rock. For a moment I really thought I was off my head. Something white moved again—what it was, I could not see. But I remembered the figure in the moonlight.

"Don't what?" I spoke out.

"Don't come here—don't come now!" It was a woman's voice answering me. "Please! I'm afraid!"

Well, the minute I heard those words "I'm afraid," my own sense of fear vanished. This thing was real. It was no dream.

"Did you steal those peaches?" I demanded, crazily enough.

"Yes," came the reply. "Will you stay out—please don't come here now!"

"If you'll come out tonight and talk to me near the spring," I said. "I saw you last night. Say yes, and I'll stay away."

"Yes," she said. "And bring something to eat with you."

I suppose the whole thing sounds loony, but at the moment it seemed perfectly natural to me. A woman was here, and she spoke English, and she was more scared than I was; that was all. I had solved the secret of the missing peaches. The woman was hungry. I was so relieved at finding it all real that nothing else mattered.

Not for long, however. I was trying to think of something else to say when all of a sudden the rope ladder gave a terrific lurch and slipped sideways and my feet went off the rung. I hung by my hands in blind panic. What happened was only too clear. Swinging back and forth in the wind, the ladder had chafed through on the sharp rocks above. Rather, one side had chafed through.

A quick shout came to me in Howard's voice.

"Leary! Are you all right?"

"I won't be for long," I sang out.

"Hang on! We're pulling you up."

He did not need to tell me to hang on. Sight of that tremendous gulf below me put all my strength into my hands; I just froze to those ropes.

They hauled away and up I went. And let me confess that I was scared; my spine had turned to jelly. When the top came close and I saw that broken rope curling and twisting it made me sick. Then, at the very top, I bumped; this was a particularly bad moment. While Matt Connally held the lines, Howard squirmed forward on his belly and I managed to get hold of his hand, and between them I scraped over the top and reached solid ground. I just lay there until I felt safe again, and they pulled me back from the edge.

"Damned unpleasant business," said Howard. "Swinging made the rope chafe in two."

"You're tellin me!" I rejoined. The two of them grinned at me, but Howard's face showed how scared he had been.

"Take it easy," said he. "Now let's have the situation down there. First, did you see anything?"

They had heard nothing of the woman's voice. I decided then and there to keep quiet about it for the present.

I told of the openings, and this immediately excited the professor. Cliff-dwellings and no mistake about it, said he. But how to reach them? When I described the overhang and how far out the ladder hung from the openings, he questioned me closely about the distances involved, and I replied as accurately as possible.

"It's a bit of a problem," said the professor thoughtfully, "but problems are made to be solved, boys. First, we'll have to wrap the ladder stoutly where it touches the edge of rock, and weight the lower end with a hefty rock, so it won't swing so easily in the wind."

"Then it'll hang straight and still won't be within reach of the openings," I said.

He nodded. "True. About ten feet out from them, you say—hm! A man on the ladder could throw a grapnel and pull himself over to the openings."

"I know one man who won't try it," I said.

"Oh, that's my job! But we have no grapnel. We must make one. It's quite safe, for I'll be held by the rope, if I should slip off the ladder. Let's go back to camp and set our wits to work. We've made sure of the cliff-dwellings—that's the main thing."

"You're mistaken," I said. "The main thing is that I'm back on terra firma—where I intend to stay."

They laughed at that, but Matt Connally gave me a queer look. Howard lit out for camp to tell Nesta the news, leaving us to follow with the ropes and ladder. Matt turned to me, as soon as he was out of earshot.

"Blast it!" he said. "We've got to stop him somehow."

"Stop what?" I demanded. He had a nasty glitter in his one black eye.

"Stop the professor from reaching those cliff-dwellings," he said.

IV

"YOU must be crazy!" I told him. "Maybe it's the altitude. What made you come here on the job if you don't want to see it through?"

He scowled at me, and rubbed his heavy jaw uncertainly.

"You don't get it," he began. "The professor happened to come here just at the wrong time, that's all. It's a business deal—"

He stopped there, which was exasperating.

"You'd better come clean, Matt," I told him. "There's something phony about all this—at least, where you're concerned. That Pete Brennan business—that man on the Albuquerque station—and now this. Come clean and let's have an understanding."

He shook his head stubbornly.

"Can't do that. I got you into this thing, didn't I? And why? Because I figured you were a reasonable guy. Now, you be reasonable and it'll be well worth while—a thousand bucks says so. If you won't be reasonable, there'll be hell to pay."

He was not out of his head; I was looking him over carefully.

"Do you mean to say that if I play ball with you, I get a grand?"

"Cash down," he assented.

"And if I don't—"

"You're liable to get bumped, Jim. That's on the level."

This was a mistake because it got my dander up.

"Any time you think you can bump me off, Matt Connally, you go to it," I said. His worried, anxious look troubled me. He meant his words. "Why not come clean? Let me in on the deal. I want to know what I'm doing, and why."

"Let it rest," he replied. "Lemme think it over, pal. You wouldn't want to see the professor have an accident, would you? Well, go easy. S'pose we sleep on it."

This alarmed me. "Might be worth while doing that," I said, "if it'll get you into a sensible frame of mind. Don't make any more cracks about the professor having an accident, though, or someone else will be having it."

"All right. You be reasonable," he growled. "Me, I got no choice; I'm not alone in this thing. Lemme think it over."

That ended it, and left me worse than wondering.

For the rest of the day we kept away from the cliff-dwellings. My job was to get the ropes of the ladder and the haul ropes wound with stout odds and ends so they would not chafe. The professor and Connally were working over a grapnel made from wire and oddments of metal. Nesta danced around the mesa top, exploring the lay of the ground and looking for arrowheads and such things.

I all but forgot about my date for that night, thinking of Connally's words. I knew when Matt meant business. Why on earth would he hand me a thousand dollars just to play his game and keep the professor from getting into those cliff-dwellings? On the face of it this looked absolutely crazy—so much so that there must be good hard

reason behind it, I argued. The threats proved this. Matt was not the lad to make idle threats.

Why should he want to keep Howard out of those Indian remains? The query stumped me, but led to something else. The white shape I had seen during the night was a woman. She had come from those cliff-dwellings and had gone back to them —how? Not by any path, because there was none. And why was she so afraid when I showed up on the rope ladder—so afraid that she would beg me to keep away? She might be some lunatic who had got stowed away here, but her voice sounded plenty sane.

"Well, I'll know more about that tonight," I reflected. "If necessary, I can consult Nesta about it. She has a gun."

I wondered if Matt Connally had one, and resolved to find out.

There was an argument at supper. In a clumsy way, Matt was trying to persuade the professor against trying the grapnel.

"That clumsy gimmick won't work," he was saying. "You'll be hanging over nothing trying to make it stick, and gosh knows what'll happen. The sensible thing is to use your short-wave set and get that plane here. Go back to Albuquerque, get the proper things we'll need, then come and go at the job."

Nesta agreed to this, because she was afraid to have her father risk his neck, but Howard just sat back and grinned at them both.

"Look," he said. "Here, waiting to be laid bare, is a culture whose discovery will startle the ethnologic world—a culture probably older than any other cliff-dwelling known, untouched, waiting for us! These caves probably go back thousands of years instead of hundreds. I certainly shall do my best to have a look at them, before quitting."

"I'm not talking about quitting," said Connally. "We could lay charges in the rock where that path used to be, and blow away small pieces of the overhang, and get down to the caves without any great risk."

"Good idea." Howard looked thoughtful. "Something to that, Connally. We'd have to go back for explosives, though. So we'll see what can be done with what we have."

Connally gave up.

The radio was working and kept us in touch with the world that evening. Not too long, because of the need to conserve the batteries, but enough; it gave me a chance to look over Matt Connally's stuff. A gun, sure enough—a German automatic pistol he must have got in Italy; they were deadly brutes, too. I left it alone, so he would not suspect anything.

I had not forgotten the unknown woman's request, and laid aside some odds and ends of grub for her.

It was perfectly clear that Connally was not going to get to first base in his attempt to argue the professor out of the projected action. Howard gave us quite a talk, before he turned in, about the arrowheads and so on he had found. He was sure they were of a different type from the usual ones, and was all worked up about what he would locate in the caves. I thought he never would turn in for the night.

There was no moon until nine or a bit after. I turned in at eight and set my brain to wake me at nine, which it did. The night was still and chill, the moon luminous under the eastern horizon, when I crawled out of the tent. I hoped Nesta was asleep, and sneaked carefully away before putting on my shoes. The spring was close by, but I decided this was the best place to wait, so I went over there and made myself comfortable.

I never heard her come. I did not know she was here until suddenly my heart jumped and I saw the ghostly white shape a dozen feet away. The moon had just come up and the flood of golden light showed her clearly—a slim figure in white garments, carrying a jar.

When I stood up she jumped in alarm.

"Hold on," I said, to show her who it was. "Too close here to camp to talk. Come off for a bit. I have some grub for you."

I headed away, but she went to the spring, and I saw she was after water. She filled the jar, then followed me. At a safe distance among the rocks, I waited, and as she came up I was startled. She was not a woman but a girl, with two heavy braids of hair that hung down in front of her shoulders, and a face like a white flower in the moonlight.

"If you're hungry, sit down and eat, first," I said, and set out the food.

She must have been half starved, for she

fell on that grub like a wolf. I saw now why she moved so silently—she wore Indian moccasins. I was so amazed at the sight of her that I just sat there staring. She stared back at me. The fright died out of her face.

"You don't look so terrible," she said suddenly, her mouth full.

"Thanks. My mother always loved me, anyhow," I replied. "Do you mind telling me who you are and what you're doing here?"

She nodded. "Yes. I do mind. What I want to know is what you people are doing here!"

"You talk as though you owned the place!"

"I do own it," she said, and went on eating, till the last crumb was gone. Then she swigged a drink from the jar and wiped her lips with the back of her hand. And everything she did was graceful, lovely, exquisite!

"Well, suppose we swap questions," I proposed. "You answer one, then I'll answer one. First, what makes you think you own this place, this mesa?"

She broke into a little trill of laughter. "Let's not be silly. I'm Janet Williams."

"All right. My name's Jim Leary. My boss here is Professor Howard. He's looking for cliff-dwellers' remains. That explains our presence."

Her mouth popped open and she stared at me again. "No! Not really?" she got out.

"Check it," I said. "Go back to the beginning—this morning. Why did you ask me not to come into those openings?"

"Because those were the end rooms, where I live. There's no way into the caves from them, except down along the cliff-dwellers' rooms, and if you landed there you'd have caught me—and I had just been taking a bath. Now is it clear?"

It came clear by degrees. "Good lord!" I exclaimed, and broke into a laugh.

She laughed too, and we got along better. "Then you people didn't come here after anything—anything definite and special?" she asked. "Just Indian remains?"

"Nothing else to come for, is there?" I rejoined.

"And you're not—criminals?"

"Not yet. Two of us are just out of the army. In the war, you know."

Her eyes widened again. "What war?"

Well, that's the way it went. We each must have sounded plumb crazy to the other. Janet did not know there was a war on! Fact. Finally I got it through my head. She had been living here, without seeing a soul, for the past six years. Let that sink in, and you will see how fuddled I was to understand anything about it.

Things had to come out by fits and starts. People in our fix just do not begin at the beginning and tell a straight yarn; it can't be done. For instance:

"It was like this," she said. "I was in a girls' school in Santa Fe. I was seventeen. My mother died when I was little. My father traveled about—he was a mining engineer. We spent the summers together. He came for me in a car that summer and we started for California. Instead, we came here."

"Why?" I asked helplessly.

"A dying man at the mines had told him some queer story and he wanted to investigate. It was true. There was a way up here, as the man had said. Iron spikes and wooden ladders were set on the north side. We managed to climb up—it took us all day. We left the car down at the bottom, of course."

"Just the two of you?" I asked.

"Yes. We were here three days, before the storm came. Oh, it was wonderful—what we found, I mean! Then came the storm, a terrific electric storm; they're pretty bad here at times. That's why the Indians called this Thunderbird Rock. And that night—" she caught her breath, then went on—"it was like the end of the world. Thunderbolts hit all around. One of them hit on the north side where the spikes and ladders were and cracked a whole piece of the cliff away—the ladders, everything! Father started to find a way down next day and—and I never saw him again. He fell. I've been here ever since."

I did not know whether I was in a dream or a cliffhanger radio drama. I pinched myself, and it hurt.

"You win, Janet," I told her. "Hasn't anyone been here since?"

"No. I suppose our car was buried under the falling rock—there's a big pile of it down there, on the north side."

"Six years—lord! How did you eat?"

"Oh, that's just it! People had been here before. I remember, father said they must have been criminals of some kind. We found

the way down into the caves, you see, where they had left things. There were enormous stocks of goods—it's all gone now except a little flour. That's why I've been hungry, trying to make the last of it do for a long time."

"Do you mean there are caves underneath here?" I asked.

She nodded eagerly. "Father said they must have been cisterns used by the Indians, originally. Through them, you can get out to the cliff-dwellers' houses along the edge. When you people came, I was afraid you were criminals, so I hid and watched you. The man with one eye—he frightened me. I was sure you were all like him, at first."

Matt Connally did not, for a fact, have any angelic air.

Well, for a bit it just flattened me, until my brain began to come alive and I could piece things together. I was not looking for reasons—just for facts. Certainly that beam and pulley had once been used to haul stuff up here from the desert below. A stock of provisions could have been laid in that would last indefinitely—but by whom? Criminals hiding out?

So it appeared. This kid Janet must have had one hell of a tough time. Seventeen then, twenty-three now. To have her dad wiped out, to be marooned here on a sky-island—it was a wonder she had kept sane. But kids are tough and hard to kill.

We must have sat there for an hour or so, talking it over and getting acquainted, before coming down to hard facts. I was sorry for her, and my sympathy warmed her out of her first suspicion; she was nervous as a scary colt at first.

"I guess you were wrong about owning this mesa," I said at last. "But you don't need to worry about those criminals, or whoever they were, coming back. If they haven't come in six years, they're not likely to now."

"My father said they'd be sure to come sometime," she replied. "He said they'd never leave all that stuff here forever. It must have been here several years before we came—"

"What stuff?" I jerked out, with visions of counterfeiting and whatnot.

She laughed. "Maybe you'd better come and see for yourself. Do you want to look over the place? Then come along."

She did not have to ask me twice.

V

JANET led me over the rough and broken ground, and paused to ask only one question.

"Do you think Professor Howard will take me away when you go?"

"Of course," I said. "Where do your relatives live?"

"I haven't any," she replied.

This girl was getting a tough break all around, I reflected. Then I stopped.

"Wait," I said. "Have you any lights downstairs?"

"In the caves? No. I forgot about that. You'd need lights. I don't. I know my way by heart everywhere."

"Well, hang on a minute. I'll go back and get a flashlight. Where do we go? How do you reach your caves?"

"There's an opening over here farther, a trap door, with a ladder."

Another mystery solved. I told her to stick around, and made my way back to the camp; there was a big flashlight near the cookstove. In the flood of moonlight here atop the mesa, no artificial light was needed, but down below it would be different.

Then, just as I reached camp, I halted; a sudden thought hit me like a blow in the solar plexus. Things had not cleared up, but they were falling into place like pieces of a picture puzzle—and here was a big section fitting in. Matt Connally, of course! Her talk about criminals of some kind gave away his whole game, up to a certain point.

Matt knew all about those caves and what they held. He was probably one of the original gang that had made use of this place. No wonder he was so set on the professor being kept from uncovering the secret, whatever that might be! The mysterious Pete Brennan was in on it, too. This trip of Howard's had been no secret. Connally had some purpose in joining the expedition. And now he was trying to stall for time—why? He was willing to hand me a thousand bucks to play ball with him—why? He was willing to go to any length if I refused—why?

The answer was, of course, that whatever was stored in those caves was worth a hell of a lot of hard money. What it was, I had no notion. As I said, my mind was running

on counterfeiters and so forth, which was foolish.

If there was a way down into the caves, some hidden way since we had not discovered it, he must know all about it. I was too excited to think any farther than this. It was a dead cinch that Howard and Nesta would be delighted to get Janet Williams back to civilization—but would Connally? A man will do a lot of things for money, and Matt was no angel. There must be a lot of money at stake here, improbable as it seemed. Somebody had stored a lot of provisions here—

"Well, the sooner I learn the reason the better," I told myself. "Then will come the showdown with Matt, and he'll have to knuckle under. He can't fight the lot of us."

That was what I thought. I should have had sense enough to realize that Matt was not playing any lone hand.

I found the flashlight. We had packed along quite a bit of fresh food, and I snaked a loaf of bread and a tin of bully beef out of the cooler for Janet. Everything was silent and peaceful, except for a snore or two, and I started back for where I had left the girl, with her big jar of water. Once away from camp I hurried along, but could see no sign of her. She had disappeared.

It was this little joke of hers, I believe, which was responsible for what happened later. I searched all around for her and even risked a low call. Not that it mattered to me if her presence were known to everybody; indeed, the quicker the better! But I wanted to settle, first, the mystery of those caves and what was in them.

With her delicious little trill of laughter, she appeared in the moonlight almost beside me, and pointed. The moon was up high, lighting the rugged ground and making everything distinct. In one of the irregular holes like pits, a square trap-door stood open and from it protruded a rude ladder consisting of a pole with cleats nailed across it.

"You seemed terribly anxious!" she said, amusedly. "I took my water down, and then could not resist having a little fun with you. Come along. Let me go first. The ladder might not hold us both."

The odds on cliff-dwellers were rapidly getting lower. I would not have been much surprised if Janet had switched on a radio and tuned in Jack Benny.

She disappeared into the darkness beneath. I followed, much less nimbly, but there was not far to go—not more than ten or twelve feet. The flashlight showed me a rock floor that sloped downward, and Janet started to take the ladder away. I checked her.

"Leave it. As soon as we come back, we'll wake up Miss Howard and her father—no more hiding out for you, kid. You'll like Nesta Howard, and she'll like you."

I thought to myself we might as well have it done with at once, and get down to cases with Matt Connally as well.

Janet complied, and pointed to the sloping rock around us as I swung the light. The underground chamber was of good size and was littered with empty sacks and broken bits of boxes.

"It must have been a grand water system when it was working," she said. "Up above were basins for collecting the water and letting it run down these holes and fill the caves; they're at a slightly lower level, you see. Now everything's fallen in and the spring is the only water supply."

"And you can get to the cliff-dwellings from here?"

"Of course. Everything's connected. There must have been a stratum of soft rock that could be scraped or hollowed out. Now everything here is dry as can be, and it is cool even in the hottest summer. Come along."

The flashlight showed me that her garments were nondescript clothes pieced together from tatters of everything and anything. But her moccasins were fresh and new—there were plenty of Indian belongings, she said, in the cliff houses.

We passed through two other caverns, neither of them large, and each littered with remnants of boxes and cartons. There were several pottery jars of water, too; Janet liked to keep a good supply on hand, she said. Then we came into another cave, and this was a large one—so large that obviously it had been a product of nature. But it was not the size of it that took my breath away. It was stacked from floor to roof.

Kegs. Slightly larger than beer kegs—nice new oaken kegs, each one burned with some label in Mexican that I could not read. I stared at them and Janet laughed.

"There's another cave beyond as big as this, and it's full too," she said. "Father

said there was a fortune stored away here—or might be some day."

"What's in 'em?" I demanded. "How'd you find the way down here?"

"Oh, we found the trap-door the first day we were here. What's in them? Alcohol. It is good alcohol, too, 200 proof, father said. He was quite excited about it. He said it must have been brought over from Mexico by plane during prohibition days and kept stored here—"

I did not hear the rest of what she said. That was enough.

Glory be! Here were hundreds of kegs of alcohol, each of which would make a dozen or two kegs of gabble gin—oh, boy! I did not need any diagram now to understand everything, you bet!

Back before the war, when there were no radar detectors to tell of planes, anybody could run hooch across the border, provided they had a place to land it. And here was the place, ready made to order. A highly organized gang must have been at work here flooding in the stuff—and they had been caught off base when prohibition came to an end. Or else some occupational accident had hit them.

What a pipe it was! Land the stuff here as occasion offered, then sling kegs in a luggage net down by means of the pulley and makeshift crane, to cars or trucks under the cliffs—why, with any ordinary caution the game could have gone on forever!

And now bootlegging was coming back, with war taxes what they were on hooch—twenty-odd dollars a case in some states. The liquor shortage was acute, with not a drop made since October of '42, and the country was drinking any sort of skull-popping tanglefoot it could get. No wonder some of the old gang had got together again, to take the lid off this stuff and put it into circulation! Fortune? A fortune was right! That was putting it mildly.

Some of the old gang, yes, but not all of them—probably most of them were dead now, and only one or two knew the secret. Professor Howard, with his ethnologic dope, had come along just at the wrong time—for him. Perhaps the exact location of this spot had been lost, in the interim. Perhaps Peter Brennan and Connally had just been underlings in the old days, knowing something but not quite enough. The background was anybody's guess. The only thing certain was that Matt Connally knew what was here, and where. No wonder he could offer me a thousand bucks to play ball with him!

I sat on a keg and looked at those stacked beauties. Janet knew the whole game; her dad had figured it all out easily enough. When prohibition ended this stuff had not been worth the expense of hauling, and had simply been left, till another and better day dawned. And now it had sure dawned.

"What'll we do with it?" Janet asked, excited because I was excited.

"Well, we won't drink it, anyhow," I said, and sobered down. Just to look at all those kegs was enough to make anybody drunk. "I don't know, Janet. We'll have to put it up to the professor. Maybe he could make some dicker with the government—otherwise, the whole shebang would be confiscated and put to war uses. I expect he could get something for you out of it, though."

"You look worried about it, Jim," she said.

I was worried, and went on to tell her why. This girl had been stuck away here for six years, but she was smart as a steel trap just the same. She had plenty of savvy. She perfectly understood why Eye-Patch Connally worried me, when I told her everything. I had the feeling that Matt was not here just to check up on things, that there was something as yet unguessed in the background. Now that I knew the secret, a score of possibilities, all of them disturbing, popped into my head. It was even possible that Howard had been put up to come here. And Matt, I remembered, had been doing a lot of monkeying with the shortwave radio this evening.

"If you want my advice, kid, let's go—" I began.

"Don't call me kid, Jim. I don't like it," she put in.

"Miss Williams, then—"

"Stop it, will you? Just don't treat me as though I were a child."

She was half serious, half laughing. "All right," I told her. "But you're so confounded pretty that—well, never mind. What I started to say was that we'd better talk to the professor and do it now, without waiting for morning."

"Whatever you think best," she assented.

What I thought best was to get my hands on Nesta's gun without any delay, but I did not say so.

"Then let's get about it," I said, and rose.

"Don't you want to see the cliff-dwellings?" she asked. I laughed, and swung the light at the stacked kegs.

"So far as I'm concerned, they can keep for a few thousand years more; there's the thing I'm worried about right now. Ready? You lead the way. Needn't take that bread and tinned willie along—leave it here."

She complied, and started off. I followed right behind, not knowing the way back to the entrance. A thudding sound reverberated around and she turned to give me a startled look.

"That's queer! It sounds like the trap-door closing—but it can't be—"

A minute later we came into the room I had first seen, which I knew by the sacking and bits of boxes. Janet stopped dead and stared, her eyes wide. I swung the light. There was no ladder. There was no open trap-door—but we could see it clearly enough in the roof overhead. It was shut.

And as we looked, more noises came from above, as heavy rocks were dumped on the door to keep it shut. We were prisoners.

VI

IT TOOK a while to simmer down and realize the truth. The only answer to my angry shouts came in deafening echoes; we were cut off from the top of the mesa.

I knew without any telling who was responsible, of course. When I sneaked back for the searchlight, Connally must have wakened. He might have slipped after me unseen while I was looking for Janet. That he should have seen anything of her was most unlikely.

"No doubt he figured that I had discovered the trap-door," I told Janet, "and to save trouble he has just bottled me up. Now, you show me another way up topside and we'll soon settle his hash!"

She looked at me and gulped. Her eyes were distended; they were blue, and the pupils double their normal size in the flashlight glow.

"Another way? But—but there isn't any!" she said. "Here, I'll show you another place where the water used to come down into the cisterns—"

She led me into another of the small cave-rooms. Once there had been an opening in the roof; now it was choked and the room itself half filled with rock and debris of all kinds. One glance was enough. Only an army corps could have got out here. I began to feel choked up and stifled.

"Let's get out of here—anywhere! To your outside suite," I said.

So we went out through passages to the cliff-dwellers' openings. I could see at once why she had made these her living quarters. Out in front was nothing but immense space filled with moonlight, and the desert far below reaching away into infinity. There was a grandeur about it that got your heart-strings and gripped them.

That huge sweep of empty moonlight, that sense of being suspended high above the world and out of it, made a person forget practical close-up things. Janet moved away and I started after her, too absorbed in looking out over the desert to notice where I was going. I struck a step where there should have been none, dropped off balance, and—whoom! Everything went out in a shower of stars.

As a matter of fact, I had turned my ankle, and landed with my skull on a rock.

So I learned next morning, when I woke up to bright sunlight, and found myself lying on a springless but redolent couch made of piñion branches covered with gunny sacks. It was Janet's bed, and Janet sat beside it sewing. She laughed and gave me a cup of water.

"You stayed asleep, so I left you like that," she said.

She had bandaged my head, which was cut above one ear, but knew nothing about my ankle being hurt. Neither did I, till I started to walk on it. A slight sprain, nothing worse—just twisted. I could hobble about at least.

Realization of what we were up against hit me like a ton of brick. Janet had hit on the trap door with a pole; it would not give, and it shut out all sight or sound from above. We were prisoners and there was absolutely nothing to be done about it. However, it did not strike me, at first, as too serious; there must be some way of shoving that trap-door up.

So I set out to find one, and Janet took me over the cliff-dwellings. These were extensive—a series of little perches along the ledge, with some mighty precarious stepping to do. They were from six to twelve feet in depth, and plenty safe enough if you did not walk in your sleep. Some were thick with debris of all kinds—bones and pottery, stone axes and whatnot, even big jars and skulls. I judged the professor would have a field day if he ever got down here. Then we came to one chamber that held a number of poles ten to twelve feet long—trimmed saplings, mighty ancient by their looks.

I picked a good solid twelve-footer and was ready to begin operations.

"A stone axe, some nails from your old boxes, bits of those boxes for slats, and we have a ladder," I said to Janet. "Also a lever to pry up that trap-door. Let's get to work."

The Howards would have missed me, of course, but trust Matt Connally to tell some likely sort of lie. As a matter of fact, they were searching the whole top of the mesa at this minute, had I known it. I hoped the professor would not try the ropes and grapnel, with Connally holding the lines, to reach the cliff-dwellings; after what I had learned, Matt's mention of an accident was no joke. But I had forgotten about Nesta.

We dragged the pole and the stone axe-head into the caves. The passage was a narrow and twisting one, but there was no other. There was no lack of nails; though most of the boxes had been burned for cooking, the nails remained, and we whanged away until somewhat precarious steps were formed the length of the pole. It took us a long while to do it, and I was mighty thankful that I had fetched that meat and bread for Janet. We ate mighty little though; no telling how long this food would have to do us.

Finally it was done, and we set one end under the trap-door. Putting our strength on it—and that girl was all muscle—we worked the bottom end along the rock floor, thus forcing the trap up. Not much, but a little. It gave a trifle more, and I could see daylight around the edges. There the pole stuck. The weight above was too heavy for us.

Janet held the pole and I climbed up like a monkey on a stick, but budge the trap-door any farther I could not. While I was working vainly at it, Janet gave a sudden cry.

"Come down, quickly! I hear someone calling—back at the cliff-dwellings!"

I heard it too, a faint voice echoing through the passage. Remembering Howard and the grapnel, I scrambled down in short order. We hurried back along the passage to the cliff openings—and there she was. Nesta!

She was on the rope ladder, and a line made fast about her body went up and out of sight. She was trying to throw, while clinging one hand, a line with the makeshift grapnel on the end, to catch in the openings. Apparently it was no go. She gathered up the line for another try.

Realizing that the professor and Connally must be tending the lines. I hobbled to the opening opposite her—she was only about ten feet away. Amazement leaped into her face at sight of me. I gestured, and called softly.

"Throw it, throw it! And keep quiet—quick!"

She swung the grapnel and let go. It clattered into the room at my side, but would have slipped out again had not Janet caught hold. Then I had it too and we pulled in on the line, while Nesta swung down another rung or two on the ladder to keep even, as we brought it in. Her father's voice sounded from above.

"Nesta! Are you all right? Answer me!"

"Do it!" I said. "Don't mention me. Hurry! Tell him it won't hold!"

"All right!" she sang out. "All right. But the grapnel won't hold—"

I saw the line fast to her body go slack. We were hauling in fast. Then the rope ladder shook and shivered, A shout burst out up above. Nesta was close—so close that I reached out and gripped her hand. Another shout, of anger and fury, came from above. The line came sliding down along the rope-ladder—cast off, by heaven! The ladder itself was going—

Somehow I managed to jerk her forward so that she fell half across the sill of rock, as the line and ladder together went sliding away, followed by a rush of loose stones. But Janet had already caught hold of her jacket. Together we hauled her in to safety. As we did so, a shot rang out above.

Then everything was silent as the dead,

and Nesta lay there gasping and looking up at us. Her face was white as death, but no whiter than Janet's.

"Leary!" Connally's voice came in a sudden bellow. "Ahoy down there! Can you hear me, Jim Leary?"

Nesta must have realized what that shot meant, now. She began to struggle free. I held her down.

"Quiet, for God's sake!" I exclaimed, as Connally shouted once more for me. Janet was hauling in the thin, strong line still fast to Nesta's shoulders. She brought in the end and held it up for us to see, significantly. It had been sliced through.

"That shot!" gasped Nesta Howard. "What does it mean?"

"It means that Matt Connally has got his way," I said. "Your dad tried to save you and Matt shot him. Keep quiet! Don't let out a yip! Connally thinks you've gone down with the ladder; let him think so."

I thought of course that Howard was done for—so did she. Everything must have struck her at once—finding me here, the strange face of Janet Williams, her own deadly peril and near escape, and that shot followed by Connally's shout. She tried to say something, then her head dropped and she went limp.

"Good," I observed. "Looks like you no sooner get rid of one patient, Janet, than you get another! We'd better lift her in to your apartment."

Janet's eyes were glowing. "Oh, that was splendid, splendid!" she exclaimed. "The way you got her in—it was marvellous! You were nearly over the edge yourself—"

"Then who pulled me back? Forget it," I said. "None of us know just what happened."

"Was it that man, Connally?" she whispered.

I nodded. "Apparently he shot her father. Come on, pick up her feet."

She obeyed. We got Nesta shifted into Janet's bedroom, put her on the pallet and let her lie while we went back to the cave and I made a desperate attempt to get that trap lifted. It would not budge another inch for all we could do. I could just see daylight around the edges and that was all—it was made of heavy timbers bolted together and to break a way was impossible. I hammered at it with the stone axe and that did no good either except to advertise my presence.

"So that's where you are!" sounded a voice—Matt Connally's voice. He laughed harshly. "Pound away! There's a rock on the door weighs more'n I do. I thought you'd be working away at this door. Well, let's have a talk. Can you hear me?"

"Yes," I said. With the flashlight, I motioned Janet to go on back and look after Nesta. She understood, all right, and went. I eased myself on the ladder, and presently Matt spoke again.

"Jim, I got bad news for you. Miss Howard's gone. She went over the edge."

"Who, Nesta?" I replied.

"Yes," he went on. "And I had to shoot Howard—he came for me like all hell and half o' Georgia and nicked me with a rock—"

"You damned murderer!" I shot out at him.

"Wait, now, wait!" he cried, and it seemed to me that he was in earnest. "I didn't go to do it—I swear to God I didn't, Jim! You know I wouldn't do that to any woman."

"Well, you did," I said. "And now you've got yourself in a jam."

He did some cursing, which seemed to relieve him. I began to think he had not meant to kill Nesta after all. He might have planned to send the professor over.

"What do you mean, a jam?" he said at last. "I'm not in a jam, you fool. You don't know what's going on, that's all."

"Of course I know. Haven't I seen the kegs down here? You and Pete Brennan are tied up with the old original gang of bootleggers and you're aiming to cash in."

"Sure," he said. "Sure. And now if you'll play ball with us—"

"You let me out of here if you want to talk," I cut in.

"You stay where you are till we're ready to handle you. I wouldn't trust you as far as I could see you, Jim Leary. But I'll make you a proposition."

We? We? Who were we? The word startled me.

VII

I HEARD a scuffle below me and shot the light down.

Janet was back. With her was Nesta, look-

ing mighty sick and white. They slumped down and listened. I switched off the light to save the batteries.

"Well, make it," I replied. "But first, what about the professor? Did you kill him?"

"No, blast it," Connally answered. "But I stopped him, and he'll stay stopped for a while."

I caught a sigh of relief from Nesta.

"What's your proposition?" I demanded.

"You can come out and give a hand, and take a cut in the money. Or you can stay where you are and get your needin's later on. Your word's good with me."

"Thanks," I said, and paused. For a minute I was tempted to take him up on it—but if I did, it was a safe bet I would not get a chance to take a crack at him. "Suppose you hand me down some grub and water, and I'll decide."

"You'll decide here and now," he said. "You can starve for all I care."

I lost my temper. "Then, you double-crossing codfish, the hell with you! And your dirty gin-money to boot."

"All right," he said. "You asked for it. This time you'll stay put."

Bang! It must have been a huge rock that crashed down on the trap-door, slamming it down firmly into place and knocking the makeshift ladder out from under, and sending me to the floor. The girls let out a yip, and in the darkness Janet got hold of me.

"Are you hurt?" she gasped.

"No. Let me get my breath," I said.

Her fingers touched my face and I kissed them, then patted her hand gently—and she left it where it was. So I did not switch on the light.

"Well, Nesta, I suppose you don't savvy the situation," I said.

"I savvy enough of it anyhow," came her answer. "All that matters is that dad isn't killed. But he's hurt. He must be taken care of."

Janet left me and went to her and they began gabbling the way women do, tongues tied in the middle and wagging at both ends. I did some cussing to myself; that fall had hurt my ankle again. However, the pain probably was what started my brain to work. I lit a cigarette and began thinking around a piece of an idea that had come to me, while they talked.

"Janet!" I broke in.

"Yes?"

"We have a little grub and water—enough to last us till tomorrow. Connally doesn't suspect there's anybody here except me, and we don't want him to suspect it. But I've got to get out of here. I was a fool to lose my head and turn down his offer. Are there any ropes around here?"

"No," said Janet. "Only the rope that was tied to Nesta."

"Hurray! I forgot about that. Just the ticket. Now think hard. Is there any place along those cliff-dwellings where there's no overhang of the rock above?"

After a minute she answered.

"Yes, there's one place—two or three of the rooms past the end. I've never been in them. To reach them from the rooms where I live is very difficult. From them, the rock goes straight up to the top, but it's impossible to climb."

"It's impossible to stay here, too," I said, and got up. "Come along. Let's have a look at it. Nesta, how are you feeling?"

"Fit," she replied. "When I heard that dad wasn't dead, it put me on my toes."

We went out by the passage to the cliff-rooms, and along them to the last one, where Janet lived, and she pointed to several openings on beyond. In between was a ten-foot space with a ledge wide enough for a fly to crawl along, and no wider. A fall of rock had gouged out the whole cliff just there, separating the two sets of cliff-dwellings.

But, above those farther rooms, was no overhang. The ledge that served as the floor of the rooms jutted out a trifle from the line of the rock up above—two or three feet, looked like. And to the top of the mesa, or a spot from which the top could easily be reached, was no more than fifteen feet. My heart jumped at sight of it.

"Boy! Here's where we go to town!" I said. "And girls, here's where you go to work, because I want to rest my ankle; I'm going to need it before long. Janet, fetch the nails and bits of box and the axe-head. Then I want our ladder here. After that, two of the longest poles from the stock-pile."

The morning was not more than half gone, but I would have to hump myself if we were going to get the job done before night.

While the girls were gone, I laid bare my foot and ankle and tied it tightly with bits of rag; I dared not use any of the precious water. I was finishing it when Nesta came back with nails and bits of boxes.

"Where's that gun of yours?" I asked her.

"Under my pillow," she said. "And, Jim! I've got a lot to thank you for. Janet told me how you pulled me in off that rope-ladder—I didn't realize it. She's a wonderful girl, isn't she?"

"Yeah. And the sun's hot out there, isn't it?" I said, pointing out to the desert. Then my jaw sagged for a minute. "Look!" I exclaimed. "Do you see what I see?"

She looked, and caught her breath.

Far down below us, but so close that they were obviously heading for the mesa across the untracked sand and brush, were two trucks.

"Did your dad have any trucks coming?" I asked.

"No, of course not," said she, excitedly. "Jim, do you think—"

"Check it," I cut in, as my heart fell. The answer struck me full force. It brought such complete understanding that I could only swallow hard and cuss to myself.

"What is it?" she asked, looking at me. Just then Janet came along, lugging a pole, and we pointed out the trucks to her.

"It's One-eyed Connally's pals," I told them bitterly. "This begins to explain everything. How they expect to get up here, I don't know; but trust them to have some way all figured out. They won't get up in a hurry, however—probably not till morning, if then. Well, that means faster work for Jim Leary! Hurry up with those poles, now."

"What do you mean to do?" Nesta demanded.

"Get topside and take a hand in the game. You'll see."

It was not such a crazy proposition as it might seem, and in no time I was hard at work pounding nails with that grooved axe-head of stone. There was no lack of rope, because we had Nesta's line and also that made fast to the grapnel.

My main job now was to get the two long poles firmly nailed together with cleats of boxwood. I got this done at last, though the ancient poles were hard as iron and tied a line to the upper ends. We had here a bridge, plenty strong to bear my weight, long enough to cross the gap and close to eight inches wide. I did not relish the prospect, but needs must when the devil drives.

Outside the end of Nesta's room was a shelf of rock a couple of feet wide. I stood out there—made fast by a line, you bet—and the girls passed out the bridge. I stood this on the butts, on the ledge; the girls had the idea now, and Janet paid out the line while the bridge was let fall as slowly as possible across the gap. It was long enough and to spare. It fell into place, jiggled a bit—and the butt end all but fell away. I rescued it and crawled back to safety for a cigarette, which I needed. My nerves were jangled already.

"Now," I said, "I'll get over there—I hope. You hang on to the line in case I go over the side en route. Then make fast the line to that ladder, so-called, and I'll get that across. After which, I'll set the ladder up, yonder, and start for the top."

"You'll never make it, with that bad foot," said Janet, looking a bit white.

"Never mind that foot; it'll get me there. It's got to."

"Let me do the crossing," put in Nesta. "I'm lighter than you are. I can get over there—"

"You're dead—or Matt Connally thinks you are. So stay dead," I told her. "This is my job. I'm the one to stop Connally. I'm the one to get the rocks off that trap-door so you can get out and look after your dad. Now quit gabbing and do your share, both of you. This is going to be a cinch for me."

We had a sandwich and a drink of water all around, and I braced myself with another smoke. My big talk was mostly bluff; when it came to crossing on that strip of timber, I could feel my knees shaking. But it had to be done.

Nesta made fast the safety line under my arms and I got out on the ledge. The bridge lay about a foot out from the cliff wall and was pretty solidly in position; there was no give to the poles, so they would not bend much if any. With one hand against the rock to steady myself, I started out.

Well, I took three slow steps—and knew I was a goner. I was too close to the rock. I tried to backstep, and like a fool did it

with my bad foot. And I caught sight of the gulf underneath me. That was the last straw, and down I went.

When anybody is as badly scared as I was then, he does the impossible. The girls let out a scream, but held the rope taut. I hit the poles as I came down, and grabbed, and dug in so hard I bet my fingers left marks in the wood. But I kept hold in spite of the shock, and edged my way back toward the shelf, and the girls pulled, and a minute later I was back where I started from, safe and sound.

Those two girls pretty near collapsed. Janet, who had a good coat of tan, was white as a sheet under it. All she could do was gasp something and point to my hands.

"Never mind," I said, wiping off the blood. "Any guy who was in the infantry in Italy gets tough in the hands. Where I made my mistake was setting the poles too close to the rock, and going slow. This time I'm going fast."

Janet came and took hold of me and looked into my face.

"You are not—you can't!" she cried. "Even if you got over there, that ladder would not reach up to the top of the rock!"

"I can scramble the rest of the way—"

"Would spikes help you any?"

"Spikes? Sure. Depends on what kinds of spikes you mean—"

"Wait!" she cried. "I forgot all about them. Wait here!"

She went tearing away. While she was gone, Nesta tried to argue with me. I pointed out that I was safe enough if the line was held fast, and brushed aside her protests. Then Janet came back, holding a mouldy old sack with something heavy in it.

"These are the kind of spikes that were fastened in the cliff when we came," she exclaimed. "We found these here—or I did. They must have been left by those first men here—"

In the sack were half a dozen railroad spikes, and I could have kissed them. Instead, I kissed Janet. Then I put the axe-head in the sack with them.

"Pass these over when you send the ladder," I said. "Hang on, now! This time I'm going across.

I went out on the shelf, adjusted the butt end of the bridge so it lay farther from the cliff, stood up—and went at it.

VIII

I WAS so damned scared that I forgot about my bad foot. Maybe I shut my eyes; anyhow, I went across that ten-foot gap—which seemed like fifty feet—like a bat out of hell, and came safe to the other side and just dropped. I was soaked with sweat from pure fright.

However, I could not let the girls see how badly off I was, so I waved a hand and stood up.

"Nothing to it!" I said. "Now pass over the stuff and we'll tackle the next stage."

Just then I remembered those trucks, and looked. We had not done all this in a minute, by a good deal; it was well past noon, because the sun had slid along overhead and this eastern side of the mesa was in shadow.

The trucks had reached the foot of the cliffs. One of them was out of my sight. The other I could just see—it was around on the southeast side and had pulled back into the desert a few hundred feet. I wondered why; I could see several men working around it.

Then, suddenly, came a gush of smoke from it, followed by a heavy, flat report, and I could see a line uncoiling in the air as it flew upward. They had a Stokes mortar or gun on that truck and were shooting a line up to Connally!

The shot failed; the line fell short. But now their whole game was clear as crystal. All they needed was one man up on top, which they had. Once a hawser was up, they could use that old beam and pulley, or another like it—they could do anything they wanted, if they had plenty of rope. A couple of men on top could send down the kegs—

"Hold on. Go slow," I told myself. "All that is possible, but it's going to take time and work. That's why Connally was willing to turn me loose if I'd lend a hand. You bet! He's going to have a hell of a hard time before any of those guys gets up to help him."

So I went back to my present occupation and gave my full attention to it, which was just as well. I had a hell of a hard time ahead my own self. And if Janet had not

turned up those spikes, it would have been all waste effort.

Placing that ladder was the devil's own job, for it had to go almost straight up. There was no one over here to hang on to my safety line, and twice I thought that I was a goner. Finally I had the bright idea of holding it in place with two of the spikes; by that time the afternoon was half gone, and the altitude had got me, so I was forced to take things easy for a bit.

The spikes worked. The rock proved fairly soft, and with a spike on either side the crazy ladder became firm. I went back to the split gap and told the girls all was set.

"From now on, I'm on my way. What's doing down below? I can't see from here. Heard the gun go off a couple times."

"Apparently the line was got up," said Nesta. "The truck's moved out of sight."

"Good luck, then!" I said. "If I make it, I'll open up that trap-door for you first thing, after dark. Not before."

"Jim!" This was Janet. "Don't fall! I don't want you to fall!"

I grinned at her. "Angel, I don't intend to fall! Thanks a lot. See you later!"

I hobbled back; my ankle was hurting like all getout, but here was where I needed all claws and toenails. With the axe-head and spikes slung around my neck, I started up that ladder.

Even now, I wake up sometimes at night in a cold sweat, thinking about it. The pole was firm, but those cleats were mighty insecure, as footing. Once, one broke away under me; that was a tough five seconds. I clung like a fly, slowly, carefully making my way upward, pain jabbing through my ankle and leg, and my heart pounding with the expenditure of energy in the thin air.

It was do or die, because I could never get back down as I had come. Look down, I dared not; look up, beyond a limited reach, I could not. I was about two-thirds of the way up when the cleat to which I clung, at my neck level, cracked and split in two. I had just sufficient warning to shift my grip, and cursed myself dizzily for not making those cleats larger and stronger. There I stuck, unable to climb on.

Then I thought of the spikes.

Here was a lucky crack in the rock. First I had to loosen my belt and pass it around the pole, and buckle it again; this held me.

The spike went into the crack. With the axe-head I hammered it solid, halfway in. Next minute I was up and had one foot on it, resting securely in blessed relief.

The job was deadly slow and agonizing. Twice I hammered my own hand instead of the spike and nearly lost the stone axe-head. I went up literally by inches; it was nearly impossible to lift my arms to hammer those spikes home. Yet they gave me sure footing and that saved the day.

I was past the pole entirely, hitching my belt over each spike while I hammered in the one above, and the rock was receding before me—when I found there were only two spikes left. That was a bad moment, with the sun westering and little daylight left, and no telling how far I had to clamber to gain the top. But I was close to it. The rock was softer and rougher, more weathered here. Though I could scarcely lift my arm, I got one spike in place, grabbed it and got my foot to the next one below, hitched my belt over this one, and reached for a spot to get the last spike in.

I found a crack. Slamming it in was a desperate job. It went in, and I went up a notch—and there I was. I was weak and sick and dizzy; but suddenly I realized that I was leaning against the rock—it was receding above, I was almost there! Carefully I got one foot, my good one, up to that final spike, clawed at the rock above, hoisted myself up in desperation.

And made it, with nothing to spare. I almost rolled back, but one frantic effort sent me up, the rock held under my bleeding fingers, and I literally clawed myself over the last foot or two and went rolling, in the right direction this time. I was up, and could only lie there gasping like a fish out of water and relaxing in every quivering muscle and nerve.

Well, I was a wreck. My hurt head ached like fury and I had damaged my ankle quite a bit in that climb. Except for the throbbing pain of it, I might have fallen asleep from sheer exhaustion. I realized suddenly that the sky was darkening overhead, the sunlight was gone, and made an effort to move and sit up. It took nerve. I was skinned in spots from neck to belly, with rubbing hard against spikes and rocks. But finally I got

into motion, though it was impossible to stand on my bad foot, at least for a time.

Dragging forward on hands and knees over that rough ground was nasty work. But from somewhere could be heard the ringing blows of a sledge, and I knew that Matt Connally was going ahead with his job, so I forced myself to mine. I was heading for that trap-door; the girls must be set free at any cost, or the way opened for them. They could get themselves out; though I still had my length of line. I had other uses for it.

To locate the spot in the gathering darkness was not easy. The sledge blows ceased, and I heard Connally shouting something; he was over at the south side of the mesa, luckily. His activity worried me. If any of those men from below got up, I was a gone coon. Nor was I in prime condition to tackle him, unless I got hold of Nesta's gun.

ALL things have an end, however, and finally I reached the dip where the trap lay, which cheered me up. I was feeling in much better shape now, having limbered up a lot, and managed to hobble along with the help of a stick I picked up. Being on my feet once more was a good bracer in itself, and I squirmed among the brush and scattered rocks until the trap-door was before me.

Then I just sat down and looked at it in absolute dismay. Without making an effort, I knew it was no more possible for me to clear that door than it was to move Gibraltar. In his determination to keep me bottled up, Connally had slewed over a boulder that looked as big as a house—a cliff-dweller's house anyhow.

Try? Of course. I mustered up all my energy and strained at it, but could not move that rock an inch. No doubt the girls were down below now, waiting for some sign from me. To communicate was impossible, with that heavy trap-door jammed down in place. I could have cried for sheer futility, had I been the crying kind. I tried to pry the rock with my stick, and only succeeded in breaking the stick. That chunk of stone must have weighed hundreds of pounds.

So now, what? The stars were pricking out their silver pattern against the black dome overhead, but the moon, approaching full, would not be up for two or three hours. I made one last effort to budge the rock and found it quite hopeless, then gave up and wiped it off the slate as hopeless. I crawled out of the hollow and started off toward the camp in blind desperation. The professor, I figured, would probably be there—and so was the pistol.

My progress in the starlight was slow and painful, but gradually hope revived. If Howard were able to get his short-wave at work, if I got Nesta's gun and got Matt Connally in the bag, all might yet be well; still, that hunk of rock on the trap-door had me stumped. I must stop Connally's work first thing, of course, and once I had the gun it would be easily stopped.

So I kept going, now hobbling, now hopping, now crawling, but getting ahead all the time. Over by the south rim, where we had located that beam and pulley, a flicker of ruddy firelight arose. Matt had started a blaze to work by, and there were plenty of dead piñon trees to feed it. His absence from camp was heartening; it left me free to go ahead.

With the rougher ground behind me, the going was easier. The little peak of rocks rose in the starlight, indicating that the spring was close; I was wild for a good drink, but the gun was most important of all things, so I headed around for the camp. And when I got there I was pretty near finished.

A light showed in Howard's tent. We had plenty of candles along for regular use. The fly of the tent was thrown back and when I got in front I could see the professor lying on his blankets, writing by the light of a candle. He heard me scrambling along and put down his pencil and paper.

"Who's there?" he demanded. "That you, Connally?"

"No. It's me," I replied, as I got to the entrance.

"Good God! Leary!" he ejaculated. "Why, that blackguard said you had fallen over the edge—"

"Nope." I must have looked like hell as I staggered in and slumped down. "How bad are you hurt?"

"Worse inside than out," said he, looking mighty haggard and drawn. "That rat shot me—upper right leg, above the knee. But that's not what hurts, Leary. You don't know what that devil Connally did—"

"Oh!" I said. "You mean Nesta. She's all right."

His head lifted a little.

"What? Do you know what you're saying, Leary?" he cried. "Why, I saw her go over myself—the rope was cut—"

"She's safe. I'll tell you all about it in a minute. First, I want to get that gun she had. Under her pillow, she said."

I was fumbling around for it while his voice beat at me like mad, demanding explanations. At last he realized what I was after.

"The gun—there isn't any, damn it! Connally got it. He went through everything. Tell me, tell me about Nesta—can't you see I'm wild to know—"

The gun gone! That blasted Connally—well, it just about sunk me for keeps.

IX

ALL Howard could think about was his daughter. All I could think about was the gun.

I even hobbled over to the other tent and searched in desperate hope that Connally might have hidden a weapon there. Not a chance.

"Well, if I sit around here long I'll stiffen up," I said, "so, gun or no gun, I'm going over and stop One-eyed Connally before he gets any of his friends up here."

"Don't be a fool," said Howard. "He'll kill you."

"Not if he isn't looking for me. And a chunk of rock may serve me as well as a gun." I recollected the short-wave set. "Say, what about the radio?"

"He smashed that first thing," said the professor unhappily. "And you couldn't use a gun if you had one. Look at your hands."

Something to that. My hands and arms were badly puffed up. The professor had me get his medicine chest and he bandaged me a bit, but all the while I was on edge with thought of Matt at work. I got my bad ankle taped tightly with a wet compress around it, and this allowed me to step on that foot more easily.

Connally had carried the professor to the tent and had given his wound attention. I rather fancy his contrition for the supposed murder of Nesta was genuine. Perhaps he had not intended her death, as he so violently asserted.

"Well, I'm off," I said.

"You're a fool for your pains," retorted Howard.

I LEFT camp in far better condition than I had arrived, at least, and made for the south rim of the mesa. The fire still burned to guide me. As I limped along, I lingered to select two chunks of rock, intending to give Matt no break whatever but to get him before he knew I was on hand.

The fire had died down a bit. I expended every effort in stealing in toward it without making a sound, getting a little clump of piñon saplings between me and the glow. Sure enough, Connally had got the big beam in place again over the edge. He had either got the old pulley working or had attached a new one, for there was a huge pile of rope.

Everything was strangely quiet, however, and there was no sign of Matt. Then, all of a sudden, I heard his voice, and a scramble just past the trees.

"Well, I'm all set if you are."

"Right," said another voice, and one that I recognized. "We'd better haul Bill up and then we can get to work. It'll take time to get those kegs down."

It was the same peculiar nasal but deep voice I had heard over the phone—the voice of Pete Brennan. And next instant two figures moved across the firelight. Brennan himself had been hauled up: he and Matt had been resting. I had lost my chance. Now I had two instead of one to deal with.

That was a facer, sure enough. It took all the starch out of me; I just went limp, and stood watching helplessly while they let the rope run out, down to the waiting men below.

"You did good work, clearing the way for us, Matt," said Brennan.

"What you aim to do with Leary and Howard?" Connally grunted.

"Leave 'em," said the other. "If your friend shows fight, give him his needin's. If not, let him sweat it out up here. Then we won't be to blame for what happens."

"I s'pose so," Matt replied, handing out the rope fast. "But he's a fighting devil, Leary is."

Brennan laughed. "So much the better, then, if we've got to finish him. We'll be coming back, you know. We can't take many of the kegs one trip. We got to leave things so we can come back with more trucks."

"I guess you're right," said Matt. "Now we've got it begun, we'll have to finish it. Don't want any talking done."

"You made one mistake when you didn't kill Howard," Brennan rejoined. "But that can be repaired. He can't hurt us now, anyhow; he won't get away to do any talking."

"Okay, then," Matt agreed. "I don't like it, but there's no way out, so count me in. I ain't much worried over killing a guy or two, but I did hate to see that girl go down. No help for it now."

As I listened, I got madder and madder. What it meant was clear enough; they aimed to wipe us all out and play safe.

"It was a mistake fetching Leary along anyhow," said Matt. "I figured he would play ball with us, like we arranged, and everything would go all right. I guess he went soft on the girl."

"Then you'd better finish him, or let us do it, before we leave," Brennan told him. "Because he'll sure be a bad actor, after what happened to her!"

You said something there, Mr. Brennan, I muttered under my breath. Leaning down, I collected two or three more stones between my feet, good hefty ones. The two of them were not more than thirty feet from me.

"There!" said Matt. "It's down."

"You had a tough job hauling me up," Brennan said, "but it won't be near so bad now, with both of us hauling in. There!"

They began to haul away, and I laughed to myself as I watched and waited. Thought of the guy on the other end of that rope did not worry me a bit, either. I hefted the nice smooth rock in my hand, with the other piece ready, and wished they were grenades instead of rocks. Then I got set, hauled back, and let fly for Connally.

I missed by a mile, thanks to those hurt puffed hands of mine, and the shock of pain that went through me when I threw.

The rock clattered. Connally let out a startled yelp. Panic jumped in me; I hurled the second rock, then stooped for a couple others, cursing the pain and letting fly with them as fast as I could draw back and aim. One of them smacked Brennan in the back of the head. He fell forward and lay still.

But Connally dropped the rope, whirled around, grabbed out a gun and began shooting. I jumped for cover as the bullets whined and whistled—and jumped on my bad foot, like a fool. The ankle gave way and I pitched forward on my face and rolled into the light of the fire.

Matt took one more shot, and the bullet struck dust and rock-splinters into my face. Then he grabbed for the rope, but it was too late—it had run out already. He whirled around, cussing a blue streak.

I was trying to get up. He saw that I had no weapon, and his cussing ended in a laugh and he threw down with the pistol.

"Stop it!" said somebody. "Stop it, Connally!"

His one eye jumped sideways. I looked too. There, coming into the circle of light, was Nesta. Connally recognized her. Into his face swept wild horror. She was coming straight for him, empty-handed but coming just the same.

"Lay off, lay off!" he gasped. "I didn't go to do it, I tell you—I didn't go to do it—"

He backed another step—and that was one too many. Next minute he was gone, with a rush of stones and loose dirt following him. His voice came up in one frantic scream, and that was all we heard.

X

BE QUIET," Nesta said to me. "You're all right—I thought you were shot. Here's Janet coming."

"But how'd you get here? Where'd you come from?" I gasped.

"Came the same way you did, of course," she replied in her cool way. "The bridge was there, the ladder and spikes were there—we made it easily."

That was all I remember, because just then Janet came and gathered my head into her lap, while Nesta stood over Pete Brennan and trussed him up good and tight with all the length of line I had fetched along.

As for the rest of it—well, I guess you have read the papers, so there's no need of going into that. The worst was waiting out the two weeks for the plane to return, and keeping Brennan safe; but after all that was just as well. It gave Janet time to make up her mind and be sure there was no mistake on her part.

There was none on mine—I had been sure of that from the first minute I saw her!

That's How It Will Be—Tougher and Meaner From Here to the Finish

THE LOST PATROL

By GEORGE ARMIN SHAFTEL

Author of "Captains Audacious," etc.

I DIDN'T mean to eavesdrop that morning. But I'd just received my new orders and I rushed into Captain Joe Carlin's quarters to tell him my plans. We were taking off in a few minutes on a patrol flight, so I was pushed for time.

I stopped short when I heard Joe's voice from the other room. His easy drawl was hot with anger.

"Next week this outfit goes overseas," he was saying. "But you're not going with us, Roberts."

"I don't understand, sir."

"I'll make it plain. I'll make it *damn* plain. I'm transferring you out of my crew."

"On account of a little horseplay—"

"That's what you call it. I call it disruption. Of the ten men in our crew, you're the one misfit. You're always making trouble. And don't ask me to give you another chance! I've given you another chance twice already, and regretted it each time."

"I'd hate t-to be left behind, sir."

"And I'll hate to have to break a new man into our crew. But you've left me no choice. That's all."

"If the captain—"

"I said that's all!"

It wasn't like Captain Joe Carlin not to let a man finish his say. It wasn't like Joe to run a hot temper.

Sergeant Pete Roberts came striding out. He saluted as he passed me and went on outside. He was biting his lip, and his sunburnt young face was pale and he looked darn close to crying. I walked on into the other office.

Joe Carlin was pulling on his flying clothes, and his lean hard face looked very troubled.

"Hi, Red."

"Say, Joe—— I heard you and Pete. You really have to do it?"

He nodded glumly. "That kid's a hopeless damn problem child, and this is no adult nursery."

"Pete's got good stuff—"

"Red, I've lain awake nights, debating that lug's case. Damn it, he and discipline just don't mix! I don't want any more part of him."

"But, Joe, it's been pretty dull here. The boys're all hopped up for the real job, and all we've been doing is flying anti-submarine patrol. So it breaks out of 'em, especially a kid like Pete. Give him—"

"No. It's not fair to the rest of the crew. He's a lousy adolescent mischief-maker and the rest of us are trying to fight a war."

"That's why he's valuable. I mean, he's got words of spirit, and energy, and that energy and quick wits and all will make him a hell of a scrapper when the going gets tough. Just now, it's simply spilling over into horseplay—"

"My mind's made up, Red. They're warming up the *Hot Shot*. Let's get going."

"I'll meet you there. Got to see somebody a minute!"

I hurried out. Our Fortress was out on the tarmac, and the rest of the crew were climbing aboard. I ran down the field toward the control tower, my parachute banging against the back of my legs. Sergeant Macy was up in the tower, talking into the radiophone to a flight of bombers just arriving from the West Coast. Sergeant Macy had yellow hair and a very cute figure.

"Oh, Sergeant," I called as she finished on the phone. She looked down, saw me and smiled. "Go bowling with me tonight?"

"Be glad to, Lieutenant."

I waved and ran. By the time I reached the *Hot Shot*, the skipper was already in the cockpit. And as I climbed in, the crew started making cracks.

"Thought WAC noncoms couldn't date officers?"

"A gal can't help it if she doesn't know anybody else."

That got a laugh; Anne Macy was the most popular WAC at the station. I grinned off more wisecracks and squeezed forward into the co-pilot's seat. Joe Carlin frowned at me.

"You got to get permission from your superior officer before you can marry, Red. And I say *no*."

But he was smiling by the time he got to that *no*. While we checked instruments I hastily told Joe about my new orders. In civil life I'm a diesel engine expert, doing research. I got into uniform when the war came along. Now, however, our men overseas found that some shot-down German bombers were using diesel motors. Now the Army wanted me back at Wright Field to help study those captured diesels for innovations we could use in developing powerful new motors of our own.

"So I leave tomorrow for Wright Field," I told Joe. "Tonight I got to talk Anne Macy into marrying me!"

Joe Carlin's lean bronzed face warmed with that irresistible grin of his. His big hand squeezed my arm an instant.

But he said soberly, "Let's concentrate on a little Army business now, Red."

I waved at the control tower as we flashed past.

FOR a bit we were busy. I had to get the landing gear up, trim elevator tabs, finish the take-off routine. From our base on the New Jersey coast we were headed out to sea on a long, dull anti-submarine patrol. Some enemy U-boats, cut off from their bases in France, were on a sort of suicide raid in the Western Atlantic.

Presently Joe handed me a folded sheet of paper, saying, "I met Sergeant Macy a while ago and she asked me to give you this."

My fingers suddenly clumsy, I opened the note, and read:

"Frank, the C. O. told me about your new orders. Swell! The C. O. also told me that

he'd give me a two-weeks' leave if I wanted to get married or something."

I let out a whoop.

Joe looked at me. "Now what?"

"Pour on the coal!" I told him. "I'm in a rush to get back!"

THE surf was a frayed white line along the beach below us, and then we were out over a choppy sea flying through broken clouds. Joe Carlin looked at me with a grin that tightened the crow's feet about his eyes.

"The Atlantic sure ain't pacific today," he remarked.

Joe had a nice dry humor. Somebody has said that a sense of humor is a sense of proportion. Joe had it. He was the most fair-minded guy I knew. Being skipper of a heavy bomber is a big responsibility. Joe was very serious about his obligations to the rest of us, and we knew it, and that's why we all hero-worshiped him. All except young Pete Roberts, perhaps.

Pete Roberts was just under twenty, brown-haired, dark-eyed, stocky and muscular of build. He had a good brain, and a lot of nervous drive to him, and a smile and blarney that had eased him out of plenty of kid scrapes. I had taught school a couple of years, and I knew Pete's type. A youngster like him had to be kept busy and interested, or he'd keep himself busy and interested doing whatever reckless thing popped into his fertile mind.

For instance, some weeks ago our tail gunner, Rudy Cagle, got a telegram from his girl saying to meet her in Grand Central Station, New York, and they'd go to City Hall and get a license and get married. Rudy begged for a leave, got it, rushed to New York. But his girl wasn't in Grand Central Station. He was AWOL for two days hunting through the hospitals and police stations, even the morgue finally, for his girl. He darn near lost his mind before he finally long-distanced her home and discovered she had never sent him that telegram. Pete Roberts had done it. We found out when Pete spent a hundred bucks of his savings buying Rudy and his girl a chest of silverware for the time when they *did* get married.

Pete's next stunt was to put a throat mike around the neck of an asthmatic bulldog belonging to one of the boys, and then rigging up a loudspeaker in the barracks. When the gang were asleep, a terrific snoring made hideous the night. Presently everybody was accusing everybody else of keeping him awake, until Pete amplified that snoring so loud it rattled the windows and they realized it was a gag. That stunt got a laugh.

But the next one nearly got us lost at sea.

Our navigator, Ross Scanlon, was a big hefty guy with an allergy. Certain things, especially face powder, made his sinuses and bronchi act up. He couldn't kiss a girl who wore make-up without going off into an attack of sneezing that made you think he'd rip out his back teeth. It was, he said, an awful handicap. Definitely it nipped romance in the bud. Well, some smart guy sprinkled *Talc d'Amour* or something on the inside of his oxygen mask. Said smart guy, of course, being Pete Roberts.

We started off on a routine flight before the thing was discovered. It happened we didn't carry any walk-around oxygen flasks that trip. Well, when we started to lift over a cloud formation, everybody put on oxygen masks, Scanlon too. And presently he started blowing. Darn near bending double with his sneezes. He had to take his mask off and clean it, all the time sneezing, and all the time we were climbing. First thing we knew, Scanlon passed out, oxygen-starved.

Young Pete, I'm sure, hadn't expected a reaction quite this drastic. He didn't get rattled, however. He snatched off his own oxygen mask and put it on Scanlon. That saved the navigator. But Pete himself passed out. And there was no extra flask of oxygen to give him.

The radioman, Dix, yelled over the intercom for us to go downstairs in a hurry. We did, and Pete Roberts revived. But, meantime, Scanlon had not been keeping navigation data; and he was too groggy still to navigate us home. We were lost. We did get home, of course, but we darn near ran out of gas at sea. We were using luck for fuel when we landed.

It was this final stunt, I was thinking now, which had made up Joe Carlin's mind to get Pete transferred out of our crew. *Maybe it'll be a good thing. Maybe it'll sober the boy,* I told myself. But that wasn't all it would do, I realized, and the thought made me kind of heartsick.

Pete Roberts would take the transfer as a disgrace and a repudiation. In spite of his

smile and blarney and mischief-making, his type of kid was deeply sensitive. The transfer would leave a scar, a tinge of bitterness, that he'd never get over. There was no malice in his horseplay, now; but after this, there might be.

And on top of all that, we'd lose a damn good man! I was convinced of that.

WE SIGHTED the submarine at sunset. It had been a dull routine flight until then. A squadron of fast medium bombers passed us, being ferried to the 8th Air Force in Europe. We had flown over a convoy, and passed a Navy blimp on patrol and a smaller blimp manned by students learning lighter-than-air. Several big cargo planes had passed us, coming in loaded with litters of wounded, and soon to be headed back with vital cargo. Impatient as I was to get back to the base, none of it interested me; the hours dragged past in monotony that was hell on my nerves.

And then, in late afternoon, we caught a radio message.

"Sighted submarine. Am attacking. Lieutenant Maury."

He gave his position—and we banked around to speed to his assistance. Lieutenant Maury was pilot of a big Navy *Mariner* seaplane. Presently we got another messaged broadcast by him.

"U-boat damaged, bow out of water, speed only two knots. My plane damaged too, wing is on fire. Will—"

And that's all we got, as if it was all his radioman was able to get out on the air.

We raced toward his position, searching the sky for the *Mariner*. But we saw no other plane at all.

I said, "Looks like the sub knocked Lieutenant Maury out of the sky?"

The skipper nodded, his lean face tightening.

"Right waist gunner to pilot—" sounded in the intercom. "There's the sub, at two o'clock!"

There it was, to right of our nose a few points. It was moving slowly across a sea burnished by sunset, stern almost awash and trailing a cloud of blue smoke. Excitedly I pointed to it, and Joe Carlin nodded, his bronzed face becoming eager and keen.

"She's damaged, Red. She can't dive, she's got to fight."

"Let's take 'er, Joe!"

"Pilot to radioman—call our base and give position of sub. Pilot to crew—prepare to attack. Mac, drop a couple a-straddle the conning tower!"

And Joe banked toward the sub, nosing the *Hot Shot* down.

And the U-boat opened fire on us. The Germans have recognized the threat from the air and their present subs are lousy with ack-ack guns. This kraut pigboat had a big gun forward that lifted its snout to throw heavy stuff at us, and she had a half-dozen 20mm. cannon as fast as machine guns that laid a solid wall of flying steel ahead of us. I felt the *Hot Shot* jar and lurch as shells tore into her; and I felt the jitter of our twin 50's in the chin and under-turret stuttering lead at the crowded conning tower of the sun.

Then our stock of bombs dropped away. And as we zoomed up in a climbing turn, I looked out the side window and saw four splashes to right of the sub. We had missed.

"Right waist gunner to pilot! Right outboard engine afire!"

I looked, my heart in my throat. Flame was whipping back from that motor.

"Feather the prop," the skipper told me calmly.

I did. We watched, taut-nerved, to see if the extinguisher foam would smother the fire.

"Radioman to pilot: the base reports that a Navy blimp and a Navy patrol bomber are proceeding to assist you. Lieutenant Ryan's *Mariner* will be here in five minutes."

Joe Carlin acknowledged, and flew our ship in a wide circle over the crippled submarine. We were crippled ourselves, with only three motors; but the flames of that burning engine were dying under the carbon dioxide jets.

"There's the *Mariner*, sir!" I said, pointing.

The big 2-motor seaplane was approaching from the west.

The skipper switched radio to the command range and called, "Captain Carlin to Lieutenant Ryan. Carlin to Ryan." And when the *Mariner* answered, Joe said, "Attack from astern while we go in from the port bow and sweep the sub's deck with machine-gun fire."

The U-boat, inching awkwardly through the water at two knots, hadn't a hope of

taking evasive action. But she put up a desperate fight. We circled wide, the *Hot Shot* and the big *Mariner,* to dovetail our attack. And we zoomed down, our chin guns and underturret 50's and the free gun in the nose streaming staccato fire at the pigboat as we came in from the side. Our lead was hitting. Men collapsed on the sub deck, men slumped to the floor of the crowded conning tower. But as one gunner dropped, another jumped to his weapon.

And as the big *Mariner* came in from astern to drop her bombs, the sub's big ack-ack gun lifted frantically, fired—and connected. The heavy shell hit the starboard wing of the seaplane, hit the motor on that side. An orange blast of flame tore the engine off the wing, and the big *Mariner* yawed into a spin as her stick of bombs fell away. The bombs geysered water to one side of the submarine, uselessly; and the seaplane hurtled toward the ocean, out of control.

"Joe!" I yelled. "The Navy plane's knocked out!"

He banked our ship into a turn so we could watch the big *Mariner.* Somehow Lieutenant Ryan got some degree of control. He straightened the *Mariner* into level flight, but almost at once she wobbled off again and side-slipped toward the waves. Again he leveled her off, and kept her level long enough to hit the water on an upright keel. I yelled, I was so relieved. The *Mariner* was all right.

"Ryan can taxi her out of range," Joe said, relieved.

Then I yelled, "Look! They're going to blast her out of the water. Let's get those dirty so-and-so's!"

The Germans were training around the 5-inch gun on their afterdeck, for a point-blank shot at the big seaplane.

Joe saw that, and Joe instantly twisted our big Fort into a vicious turn and nosed down for the U-boat as if he thought he was piloting a dive bomber. But that deck gun already was being sighted. It roared. And the shell struck the cabin of the big *Mariner,* just back of the high wing, and the explosion tore the seaplane in two. Just broke her apart.

Then the U-boat's 20mm. guns were reaching for us as we leveled into our bombing run. Repeatedly I felt the Fortress jar in shock. Then our bombardier's "Bombs away!" rang in the phones, and we were swooping over the sub and away, and the skipper banked the *Hot Shot* and we saw our bombs straddle the U-boat. We saw columns of spray balloon skyward and engulf the submarine under avalanches of water.

Then reports started coming over the earphones—

"Right waist gunner to pilot! Ball turret took a direct hit. Hogan is dead, sir."

"Radioman to pilot. Hydraulic system knocked out, sir. Oil all over floor. And insulation on fire, sir, and oxygen line leaking!"

And looking out at our right wing I could see a dozen jagged-petaled holes gouged by 20mm. slugs.

"The hell with it," I said. "Just so we got that sub!"

"What sub?" Joe said, glancing at me. "Look."

I looked, as Joe ordered the radioman to work on the fire with a carbon dioxide flask. I looked below as we banked in a wide circle —and I saw the U-boat had bobbed to the surface again. She was still crawling along. And now more men were pouring out of her hatches to man her guns and take wounded below.

"Where's the *Mariner?*" Joe asked me. "What's happened to the Navy men?"

I SWIVELED my neck to look back. The broken seaplane was low in the water now. But her men had launched two life rafts. Seven survivors I counted, which meant that three of the Navy flyers had been killed. *Thank the Lord it was only three!* I told myself as I reported aloud to Joe Carlin.

"Tail gunner to pilot!" Rudy Cagle's voice cracked he was so mad and scared. "Lookit the damn sub! She's headed toward the seaplane!"

We looked below. The seven Navy men were pulling away from their wrecked seaplane in two rubber rafts—and the submarine was turning toward the two rafts now.

"Maybe the sub's going to pick up the survivors?" I said.

So we watched, not shooting, as the U-boat reached the rubber doughnuts and the seven Navy men were hauled onto the deck of the pigboat. They were lifted, then, to the conning tower—all but two of the Navy men,

who were hustled forward to the crew of the big ack-ack gun.

Then the sub opened fire on us again!

"Tail gunner to pilot! They got our boys in the conning tower with them, sir. I'm not f-firing, sir!"

"Pilot to crew," Joe said. "Hold your fire."

Our bombardier said, "I got two bombs left, sir."

Joe looked at me, anguished indecision on his lean face.

I said, "We can't kill off our own fellows, sir."

"Of course not!"

So we pulled out of range, and circled, watching. The minutes passed, and sunset faded out of the sky and dusk began to darken into night. The sub crawled steadily eastward through the choppy waves at her two knots.

And then, suddenly, I noticed a change. The U-boat was picking up speed! Her repair crews evidently had at last mended the damage which had kept her inching along on the surface! Then we saw the men on deck start pouring down her hatches. She was going to dive.

"If we're going to get her, we got to get her now!"

Joe Carlin looked at me, his dilemma plain and anguished upon his hard expressive face. It was his duty to sink that sub. But to do so would mean killing those seven Navy men from the *Mariner*.

"I can't do it, Red," he said.

"Oh, yes you can! Look!" I yelled, my voice shaking I was so furious.

For, down there on the sub, the prisoners from the seaplane were being booted off of the U-boat. Knocked headlong into the water. And as we watched in stunned horror, two Nazis in the conning tower opened up on the Americans in the water with machine guns.

I was yelling, though I don't know what. And Joe Carlin ordered, "Pilot to bombardier —lay your bombs down their conning tower hatch!"

And Joe was nosing down to pick up every last gust of speed, and we roared in low, motors snarling into screaming pitch. Those two machine gunners on the sub tower heard us, and looked up, and lifted their gun sights. We were a huge target as we thundered in on them, a target they could not miss, and their slugs streamed into us.

But our last two bombs went down, and landed on the U-boat behind the conning tower, and in the flash and smoke and spray I couldn't see anything. I could *feel* something, though; my side felt numb and bruised and when I put my hand against my ribs, I felt warm moisture. And when I moved, pain knifed into me. I'd been hit.

But I forgot it for the moment as I saw that our left wing was on fire. Both our port engines were knocked out and blazing, and the fire was tonguing back over the whole wing.

"Prepare to abandon," the skipper was shouting into the phones. But he was banking in a turn as he nosed the Fort down; and looking back we saw that our bombs had broken the U-boat in two, laid her wide open. Just a glimpse we got as she was settling, and then she was under, sinking fast.

"We got her," I blurted. "She's done for."

Joe repeated into the phones, *"Prepare for ditching!"*

WE HAD only a few precious seconds to get ready before the *Hot Shot* would hit the water.

Our radioman put out a frantic "May Day" call of distress, giving our position. The bombardier got busy destroying the bomb sight. The gunners heaved overboard guns and ammunition, and shut the lower hatches, then rushed into the radio compartment. There Pete Roberts had opened the windows and upper hatch and grabbed a pack of emergency rations. The men got down on the floor and braced themselves with their feet against the forward wall. And in the cockpit, Joe Carlin and I tightened our shoulder harnesses to hold us back in our seats so we wouldn't smash our faces into the instrument panel when we hit. I lowered the wing flaps and made sure that the landing gear was up. I wasn't feeling a lot of pain yet, but knew I would when the numbness wore off.

"Brace for ditching!" Joe yelled, and cut the ignition.

He held the nose up until the *Hot Shot* fully stalled, then she hit.

There were two impacts. First an easy one, when the tail touched. Then a smashing bang as the belly came down and the nose ploughed

in. Instantly our turret gunner turned the dinghy releases, and our two five-man rubber rafts popped out onto the wings, already inflated.

"Get going, Red!" Joe yelled at me, and he slid out the left window onto the port wing and grabbed his life raft.

I worked myself out through the window onto the right wing. Stocky young Pete Roberts was right behind me, and but for him I'd have slid right off the wing into the water. All of a sudden I realized my side was covered with blood, and my fingers seemed too limp to grab hold of anything. Pete grabbed me, and grabbed the raft with his other hand. Then the rest of the crew came out of the windows and helped launch the dinghies and Pete helped me get aboard ours.

"Let me put a bandage—"

"I can wait till we pull away," I interrupted.

Each raft had a couple of light aluminum paddles, and soon as we'd made a hurried check on rations, thermos bottles of water and radio set, we rowed away from the *Hot Shot.* I guess there wasn't one of us that didn't gulp as the big plane choked down out of sight.

Joe Carlin ordered, "We'll row toward the sub, to pick up the boys from the *Mariner.*"

If any of them are still alive, I thought to myself.

WE HAD been astern of the U-boat when she sank, so now as we paddled toward the spot we passed the two life rafts belonging to the crew of the Navy *Mariner,* and we took them in tow. And Pete Roberts, his dark eyes worried and intense, opened a first-aid kit and got busy plastering a sterile pack over the wound in my side. I felt kind of sick and giddy, but somehow there was a lot of reassuring strength about stocky young Pete.

Things had happened fast, just the same the twilight was getting darker by the minute and I began to wonder if we'd find the spot where the U-boat had gone down. We must have paddled a half-mile before we found a slick of oil, a huge splotch of oil that had gutted up from the slaughtered sub.

And we found the men of the *Mariner's* crew floating in their Mae Wests. But of the seven Navy men whom the Germans had taken aboard as prisoners, only three were alive, and they were wounded. It was a job to get them into a dinghy, but it was done, and Pete Roberts got busy doing what he could with his first-aid kit.

Joe Carlin ordered, "Bill, get the Gibson Girl working."

Our radioman gripped the compact emergency radio between his knees and started cranking the handle which powered the set and sent out a distress signal.

I guess I was the first man to notice the big piece of debris which popped up on the surface nearby our life rafts. It was round, shaped like a huge fishing-net cork. It must have come up from the sub, I realized.

But not until I saw a man's head bob up beside that float did I know what its real purpose was.

"Captain Carlin!" I called to the skipper, and pointed. "There are some survivors in the U-boat. They're coming up a life-line attached to that float."

"Let's scram out of here," Slim Wolfenden said.

"Hell, no! Let's wait by the float," Rudy Cagle said, "and knock on the head every lousy kraut who comes up!"

Joe Carlin commanded sharply: "That'll do. There can't be many of the sub crew alive. We got an extra raft we don't need."

We were closest to the float, and Pete Roberts leaned over and helped the man into our raft. The German's face was agonized, as if coming up from a great depth had been a damned rugged chore. Strapped across his chest was a rubber "lung" something like the Momsen escape lung used by our own Navy. From it a pipe and mouthpiece brought oxygen for a man to breathe on his way up from the bottom. He was a husky specimen, this Nazi—he wore only trousers—but he looked close to collapse.

A second German bobbed up beside the float even as we got the first sub man into our raft. So Joe Carlin ordered the men in his dinghy to push the empty life raft up to the float. They did, and they got busy helping the second German into the raft.

That second sub survivor was bleeding at nose and ears and looked pretty bad. He couldn't help himself much. Getting a man

into a rubber dinghy is a ticklish job under the best of conditions, anyhow, and we were all watching, which we shouldn't have been.

For the German in the bow of my dinghy sat up, and he had something in his hand. I noticed it the same instant that Pete Roberts noticed it, but even then it was too late.

The Nazi had brought a pistol hid inside his pants. His first shot put a slug into our emergency radio. And as our navigator, Scanlon, swore and grabbed up a paddle and swung it the German shot him through the heart.

And in good English the Jerry said, "You will neither scram nor knock any of my men on the head. We need these rafts. Just sit still. Take the Mae West off that dead man and heave him overboard."

We sat still. We looked at him. But not one of us moved to heave Scanlon overboard. The German grinned without opening his tight lips at all. I knew what he was thinking. Most of us did. And Slim Wolfenden couldn't keep quiet.

"They need these rafts! Skipper, don't you know what they'll do to us? They'll—"

The pistol roared again. Slim crumpled, slid headfirst over the side of Carlin's dinghy.

HARSHLY the German ordered then: "The three wounded men in that other raft—put them out! They can float in their life belts. I've got twenty men coming up from a depth of a hundred and fifty feet. Some of them will be in bad condition and I'll need room for them.

"We didn't move, just looked at him, hating him, hating his orders. But we'd have to obey, I knew; none of us wore sidearms. We were helpless.

"Obey my orders!" he snapped, gesturing with his gun.

Pete Roberts said quickly, "Leave the wounded men where they are. Three of us will get out to make room."

And he went overside, arching his muscular body in an easy-looking dive. Rudy Cagle and Tim Arnott followed him so readily that I found my eyes stinging, I was so proud of them.

But the German yelled, and bit off a "*Verdammte!*" and moved his pistol. Three times it spurted fire. I saw Arnott throw up his hands, and Cagle screamed and went limp in the water, and Pete Roberts vanished under the surface.

It was swift, brutal, efficient—and more than I could stand. I flung myself at the German, and got hold of his gun arm and dragged him down to the bottom of the raft. But I hadn't enough strength. I couldn't keep him down, and I knew he was going to pull loose and he was going to lift that gun and jam it against my chest and pull trigger.

And he did pull loose, and lifted himself up. I looked at him, waiting. But Joe Carlin had swirled his raft toward us, and Joe flung his aluminum paddle at the Jerry, and Joe lunged from his dinghy. Instinctively the German dodged as the paddle came at him, and his gun went off to the convulsive squeeze of his finger, but the shot went wild, and then Joe hit him, knocking him backwards onto the side of the dinghy. Again the pistol fired, but Joe struck to the Nazi's face, and the Jerry went limp. I heaved at him then, and the German went overboard.

"We got 'im, Joe!" I gasped. And then I saw how Joe slumped back and caught a quivery breath. "Joe, you hurt?" I demanded wildly.

"Got a slug in me, I guess," he said.

The two boys in the other raft had another first-aid kit.

"Payson, put a dressing on the skipper's wound," I ordered. "Dix, you look for the boys who went overboard."

Joe Carlin was shot in the chest. Whether the slug had hit a lung or not we couldn't tell, and Joe was numb with shock, which was a mercy. Rudy Cagle we picked up, bleeding badly from a bullet that had broken his shoulder. Tim Arnott was dead. And Pete Roberts we couldn't find at all.

"More of those Germans will be coming up from the U-boat," I said. "Let's haul away from here!"

I hated to do it. Somehow I hated to leave young Pete Roberts behind, though I realized he was probably dead. But I had to think of the rest of us.

Of our group, Payson and Dix were able to paddle; the rest were the wounded, and dead. Bill Dix got into my dinghy, tied onto the raft in which the three hurt *Mariner* boys were lying, and started paddling. Payson paddled the other raft; and the

fourth dinghy we just left behind, empty. We wouldn't make very good time with just one paddle to each clumsy rubber boat, but I was beginning to feel too drained and exhausted to worry any more.

Bill Dix said, "Couple men swimming back toward that float."

"Let's get goin'," I said.

And then we heard a yell behind us. "Hey, Lieutenant! Lieutenant McElvy!"

I blurted, "That's Pete Roberts! Turn back, Bill!"

Dix helped Pete Roberts back into our dinghy.

"You hurt, Pete?" I demanded.

"No, sir. I swam under water when the Jerry shot at me. I've been hanging onto that wooden float from the sub."

I was so glad to see him back, unhurt, that it gave me a lift, I felt better. He grabbed a paddle.

But his face was worried as he looked back.

"Three more of those Jerries've come up," he said. "And still more coming."

WE LEFT the rubber dinghy behind. We shouldn't have done that. But we didn't need it and leaving it seemed a trifling act of mercy.

Already survivors from the submarine were climbing into the rubber raft.

And then Pete announced, "They're paddling after us!"

And they'll catch us, I realized. For our three dinghies were heavily loaded, with one paddler apiece.

Presently the Germans shouted to us. And when we didn't stop, a burst of gunfire whipped over our heads. The Jerries had a small machine gun of some kind they'd brought up from the U-boat.

Joe Carlin murmured, "They want these dinghies."

"And if we don't turn back, they'll seize us. Turn back," I ordered the boys.

The Nazis had a Schmeisser machine pistol, I saw as they came near. It looked like a .45 automatic with a double length of barrel, with a foot-long cartridge clip sticking down below, and I figured it would fire about as many rounds as our own type of tommy gun.

Leveling that gun at us, the three Germans gave us orders.

First, we had to row back toward that round wooden float.

Several more of the sub's survivors had been borne to their surface by their escape lungs. We were ordered to help them into our rafts.

"We are twenty in all," the German with the gun said in English. "You will have to find room for us." And that last had an ugly sound.

Dusk was getting so dark now that the Jerries used the flashlights we had in the dinghies. And I noticed that they looked like they were in pretty bad shape. The first man Pete Roberts hauled into our raft was bleeding from his nose and ears and fighting to breathe. And the next Jerry was unconscious. And I thought to myself that coming up from 150 feet of depth, where the pressure of the water is something like five times ordinary air pressure, is something that only a tough man in good health could stand. Too bad this Nazi with the Schmeisser hadn't been killed by it!

The next German who came up *was* dead. And the next one was moaning with agony and unable to help himself at all. The next Jerry was in better shape. Then another man floated up dead; and the next survivor sobbed and moaned and twitched and doubled up in Payson's raft as if in agony he couldn't stand. They were young men, and husky, these Nazi pigboat sailors. They wore shorts, and several carried watertight pouches. One brought up a compact radio set.

But, tough and husky as they were, as they were helped into our rafts they looked as if they'd been wrung through the wringers of hell. And I thought to myself that parachuting down from a plane was safe and sane luxury compared to floating up from a submarine.

Some fifteen survivors in all reached the surface. The other four or five the officer with gun was waiting for just did not appear at all. The Jerries did some angry, worried debating back and forth among themselves. I didn't understand their lingo. But I did understand that some of that rage carried over into their feelings about us. For half a cent that man with the Schmeisser would've shot us and heaved us overboard. One of the three wounded men from the Navy *Mariner* had died. Him, and Wolf-

enden's and Scanlon's bodies the Jerries did push over the side.

"Paddle," the officer ordered us then, gesturing eastward.

So young Pete, and Dix and Payson, and several of the Nazis, started working. And I realized, hopelessness suddenly an aching sickness in me, that the farther we moved from our original position, less chance that rescue planes would find us.

And then I realized that there was practically no chance of rescue anyhow. Because the Nazis put their compact radio into operation.

An emergency radio hasn't an awful long range. So this could mean only one thing. There was another German U-boat nearby. This sub we had sunk was one of a fleet.

I was sure of this when the German officer stood up and winked a signal from a flashlight. A dash, a dot-dot-dot, and dash-dash-dot. Twice he repeated it, and stared into the east, looking for an answer. He didn't get one. But from his confident tone of voice as he talked to his men, I realized that it was just a matter of time before he *would* get the signal he was expecting.

I WAS in pretty bad condition from my wound, or I would have noticed certain things even before Pete Roberts hinted.

But I was sunk deep into my own wry thoughts. This was my last patrol flight before I was to go back to Wright Field, before I was to get married. So of course I'd get shot down. It always happens that way. Just one more dive, a kid says—and he's hauled out of the swimming hole drowned. I thought of Anne Macy. I thought of my folks. Of all the loose ends in my life. I thought of all the fine things I'd promised myself that I would some day do for my folks. We all do that. Only now, I likely would never get a chance to do these things.

Anne's face was vivid in my mind. And huddled over in pain as I was, the living warmth of her was so real to me that for a bit my erratic pulse skipped and raced. There was so much we'd wanted to do together, so much we were going to miss out on! All we'd had was a hasty courtship; now she'd have to get over me, now she'd be left a little less whole of heart, a little less buoyant against the future.

The German who was helping Pete Roberts paddle our dinghy laid down his paddle. He acted sick. He was breathing hard, sort of reeling where he sat. The officer snapped something at him, but the Jerry didn't seem to hear. He just slumped over the gunwale and vomited, and lay there. I realized, then, that the Jerry who'd been paddling in the dinghy next to us had quit too. And it was odd, I thought then, that this bunch of survivors from the sub were so quiet. You'd think that a gang of men who'd actually saved themselves from a U-boat sent to the bottom would be noisy and excited with reaction.

The officer with the Schmeisser gun leaned over one of his men, flashed his light on the man's face and pushed an eyelid up with a finger. I heard him say, *"Todt."* Dead. And the officer pushed the body overboard. Then the officer sat back, lifting the Schmeisser again. I noticed that he was breathing as if he'd been running hard.

Then Pete Roberts started talking.

"Lieutenant—"

"Yes?" I said. And cautioned, "Careful."

"I got a hunch this Jerry officer ain't hearing too well."

He whispered it, and I saw his stocky body tense, as if he were waiting to see if the Nazi would lift that machine pistol and shoot him. The German did not move.

"You see?" Pete said, a little bit louder. "Lieutenant, these Jerries are sinking!"

"What d'you mean?"

"Bends. They've got the *bends,*" he said excitedly.

I thought about it, trying to clear the numb haze out of my brain by sheer will power.

"Well, some of them, maybe—"

"All of them!"

"Don't count on it," I said sharply.

"I am counting on it. I'm banking my life on it!"

He sounded so urgent, so hopeful, so wildly hopeful, that I tried to reason it out. The U-boat had been 150 feet down. The pressure of the water on a man's body at that depth would be something like 75 pounds per square inch. Five times normal. Coming up from that depth to the surface

meant rising from a pressure of 75 pounds to a pressure of 15 pounds. Why, the danger involved was something like the risks we pilots faced in rising from the ground to 40,000-foot levels. The *bends!* Before making a high-altitude flight, a pilot usually breathed pure oxygen and exercised to work the nitrogen out of his system.

Men at 150 feet depth in the ocean would have the nitrogen in their systems absorbed by the body fluids. The pressure would sort of ram the nitrogen into their bloodstream. Coming up out of that pressure, the nitrogen would be released. Bubbles of it would gather in various parts of the body, and would cause terrific pains in the muscles and joints. Nitrogen bubbles freed in the inner ear would cause deafness and vertigo, and bubbles set free in the spinal cord would cause paralysis, and bubbles in the heart would stop circulation. Sometimes the symptoms would appear immediately, sometimes several hours intervened.

Because of the danger of "bends" deep-sea divers always go through a process of decompression on rising to the surface.

"That's why the Jerries sent up a float from the U-boat," I whispered to Pete. "There was a life line attached to that float, and men coming up the line with their escape lungs paused at knots set in the rope. They don't just pop right to the surface! They wait at every knot for a definite time!"

Pete didn't answer. There was some commotion in the other raft. Somebody let out a gasping shout in German.

And abrupty the officer in our raft lifted himself up, staring.

Then, far ahead of us, I saw a light blinking a signal.

"Another U-boat," Pete blurted.

"Coming to rescue these Jerries!" I said.

The officer with the Schmeisser was raising up, the flashlight in his hand, to signal to that oncoming sub.

Pete said, "We got to do it now, sir! Dix!" he called sharply. "Payson! *Take 'em!*"

Pete was swinging with his paddle even as he shouted. For an instant the German officer was off guard, the machine pistol held awkwardly in one hand. But he was a fighter. Convulsively he used the weapon, and the Schmeisser stuttered a wild burst as the aluminum paddle struck him across the chest, staggering him.

I choked up, sure that those slugs had smashed into young Pete. But they'd missed him, and then Pete had lunged in low, flung himself at the Jerry, hit him so hard they went overside together, the gun with them.

In the dinghy just ahead I heard Bill Dix cursing like mad, and the hard *thwack-thwack* of his paddle.

Then he was shouting, "Hey, Pete! I got my Jerries licked! They're dead beat!"

And Payson yelled from the other raft, "Same here! These men 're too sick to lift a hand!"

I yelled back as hearty as I could, "Pete went over the side. But we got control. Tie onto this raft and paddle south. There's another German U-boat east of us hunting for these men." And then a hand was reaching over the side of my dinghy, and another hand came up. Was it the Nazi officer, I wondered; and groped around for something to swing at him.

But it was young Pete Roberts who rose up, and I heaved my weight to the opposite side of the raft as he sprawled over the gunwale. Immediately, panting for breath, he grabbed a paddle and started to work.

"Bend those paddles!" he yelled at Dix and Payson. "That other U-boat maybe saw the gun flashes and heard those shots."

Joe Carlin, lying wedged beside me, chuckled. His voice so weak and low I could hardly hear, he said, "A fighter, young Pete. If you get in, Red, make sure he gets credit."

"You'll get in all right, Skipper!" I said. "By daybreak there'll be a dozen ships hunting us."

"Sure, sure. But just in case."

AS THE dinghy was lifted on the long swells, I kept watching to the east. And the wild triumph that was racing so hot through me now suddenly choked and died as I sighted a light blinking signals again low on the water. That other U-boat was closer, definitely closer; and systematically she would search this area. Sure, there'd be a dozen ships hunting for us by daybreak; but long before daybreak that sub would locate us.

I must have eased out a long, shaky sigh of discouragement, because Pete Roberts looked at me and spoke.

"You feeling all right, Lieutenant?"

"Sure. I've just been wondering, though," I said, to make talk, "howcome you were so darn positive all of these Jerries would be disabled by bends?"

"I made sure that they would be, sir.'

"You *what?*" I gasped.

"I made sure they'd all get bends," he repeated.

"But how could you?"

"Like you were telling me a while ago—men escaping from a sub lying pretty deep have to come up a life line, so they can stop themselves at various levels—"

"That's right. If they pop right to the surface they get bends."

"That's what happened. These Jerries all popped right to the surface. Y'see, sir, the first time I dived out of this raft and that Jerry shot at me, I swam under water to the float holding the life line from the sub. And while I was there I unfastened the life line from the float. That's all there was to it."

"I'll be damned!" I murmured. I could just see what had happened—that life line, loose from the float, sinking down through the water, trailing and useless; and, without it, the sub survivors shooting up through the water, lifted by the buoyancy of their escape lungs like a balloon going up through the air.

Huskily young Pete said, "I wouldn't have done that, if—"

If the Nazis hadn't grabbed the boys from the Navy *Mariner* and held them as shields against our bullets, if the Jerries hadn't booted the wounded men off their sub when they started to crash-dive, if that tough sub officer with the pistol hadn't ordered us to toss our wounded overboard, then shot, the men would voluntarily give up their places in the dinghies! They'd played it mean and vicious, these Nazis. That had ruined them. That would forever ruin them.

"It's all right, kid," I said hurriedly. "You did just fine."

I SHOOK my head, annoyed by the dizzy murmuring in my ears. That bandage on my side was soggy with blood, and pain pulsed in knife jags through my innards. I began to wish I'd pass out, so I'd quit feeling it, and quit having hallucinations. That murmur in my ears sounded so *damn* much like the faint, far-off rumble of an engine. When I *tried* to listen, though, all I'd hear was the swells breaking against the rubber bulge of our rafts and Pete's paddle chopping raggedly into the water.

"Pete seen the blinker from the submarine again?"

"No." He quit paddling, and shook his head. "I got a ringing in my ears or something. Seems like I hear a motor."

"Good Lord! We can't *both* be crazy. I've been hearing it, too! Everybody listen!"

And this time there was no mistaking it. A faint rumble in the sky to the west. Gradually it grew louder.

A plane. Probably hunting for us.

"But if we signal with a light, that sub will see us!"

"The plane will bomb that sub," Pete said.

"Unless the sub dives, and waits. The plane will have to leave us—"

"But the plane can radio our position."

But no ships were near enough to reach us before morning! I didn't say this out loud, though. I kept still, trying to think of what to do next—

We could see the blue exhaust plume of that plane now.

And then suddenly my heart leaped. That wasn't a plane sweeping this way—it was a blimp. It was the Navy blimp which had been headed for us when Lieutenant Ryan's *Mariner* came rushing to help us against the U-boat. The blimp had caught our first "May Day" broadcast when we crashed! Now she was hunting us.

"A blimp," young Pete said, so disappointed his voice broke. "The sub will blow that rubber cow out of the sky."

"Like hell," I said. "Give me the flashlight!"

Pete hesitated. "If you signal, sir, you may draw the sub."

"I know, and we got to risk it," I said.

But I turned to face the west, shielding the light with my body, and with a hand cupped around the lense. And toward the blimp I signalled in blinker code: "D-o n-o-t s-h-o-w l-i-g-h-t s-u-b n-e-a-r-b-y." And I added, "S-i-l-e-n-c-e m-o-t-o-r-s."

The blimb crew saw us, for immediately the blimp angled straight toward us. Her two motors were not silenced; they couldn't be, of course. But they were throttled down

low. And I hoped that the clatter of the U-boat's diesels as she cruised on the surface hunting us would prevent the Germans from hearing the blimp's engines.

Shielding the light, at intervals I blinked it to guide the blimp straight toward us. And finally her great bulk blacked out a huge segment of sky as she loomed fifty feet over our heads. Her props were turning over just enough to hold her into the breeze, rolling just a little, but remaining right over us.

"We're survivors of Captain Joe Carlin's bomber crew," I called to the blimp skipper. Rapidly I explained about the wounded men from the Navy *Mariner,* and the Germans in our dinghies.

The blimp lowered a line and rig. We fastened to one of the dinghies, and the blimp crew winched the dinghy aloft. Lieutenant Dunn, skipper of the blimp, said he'd take all the injured men.

"All our prisoners are in bad shape, from bends," I said.

"I'll take 'em. I've used up over half my gas and have only a partial bomb load," he explained. "However, your uninjured men will have to remain in their rafts and be picked up in the morning. "Even without them, I'll be overloaded."

That hurt—the thought of taking these Nazis ashore and leaving Pete Roberts and Payson and Bill Dix here when that lurking U-boat might get them. And I started to protest.

"No, Lieutenant! Our men—"

Joe Carlin, weak and hurt as he was, said, "Red, prisoners are entitled to medical care as soon as it can be given them."

I started to argue—and then I thought of something.

"Okay," I said, trying to keep my zooming excitement out of my voice. *"Okay!"* and I called, "Pete! Come here."

I talked to him hurriedly as the blimp winched a second load of passengers up to the cabin. Pete laughed, when I finished, and wrung my hand. Then the skipper and I went in the last load up to the blimp.

Below us, young Pete and Dix and Payson were left in a dinghy. The blimp nosed up and her motors quickened.

But as we gained altitude, down there in the rubber dinghy, Pete Roberts faced eastward and switched on his flashlight.

In blinker code, Pete flashed a dash, then dot-dot-dot, and dash-dash-dot. He repeated.

And then came an answer!

"Lieutenant Dunn!" I yelled, and pointed, so that blimp skipper would see that blinking signal to east of us. "That's a U-boat out there! He's coming this way, on the surface. If you play it smart, you can sink him!"

"We'll try," Dunn said soberly.

He ruddered the blimp into position, between the raft and the sub; and silenced the motors. A gust of wind made the blimp roll and pushed her southward, out of position. I swore, under my breath, as if the sub crew might hear me! I was that keyed up.

Down below, Pete Roberts blinked his signal again.

The U-boat cruised straight toward him. We could hear the sub's diesels, presently. And then the Jerries switched on a searchlight in her conning tower. I had an awful moment. Suppose they turned that light skyward and spotted us? One shell from a deck gun would blow us into the sea.

But the Jerries swept the water with that light. They were tired and impatient, I reasoned. Their light hit the rubber dinghies, then. And young Pete raised himself up and waved wildly, like a sub survivor wild with joy at prospect of rescue.

"Now!" I blurted. "Good God, Lieutenant, you waiting until the sub picks those boys up?"

But even as I burst out, the blimp skipper was ringing his engine signals; and then the warm motors clattered into life and the airship lunged forward.

Lay your bombs right on their deck! You've got to, got to!

I was shouting it, inside my mind. Dunn knew what he had to do. It would be just too bad for us if he didn't. Already, as we nosed in low for a sure shot, machine-gun tracers spurted skyward at us. We drove right into the streams of them, faster, lower—

I felt the blimp lunge upward, and realized that Dunn had released his bombs. For split-instants like eternities we waited, and I realized that now the Germans had opened up on us with 20 mm. quickfirers.

Then it came. We had laid four bombs right on that sub's deck. The blast laid the

night wide open, the roar and glare blotting out the world, concussion hitting the blimp so hard I was sure it would rip her skin apart. . . . But she leveled off, and we picked ourselves up from the floor and looked overside; and when our eyes had adjusted so we could see again, there below we could see the dinghies, we could see Pete Roberts and his buddies waving at us. But no conning tower jutted from the waves, no sub lay awash—only a great spreading blotch of oil slick and debris marked the U-boat's grave.

And thinking of those Nazi officers, I said, "You wanted it mean and rough. All right, that's how you'll get it, tougher and meaner still, from here to the finish!"

So I didn't keep my date to go bowling with Sergeant Macy that night. It was dawn by the time we got back to our base, and we were rushed to the hospital. I wasn't there five minutes, however, before Anne was at my bedside.

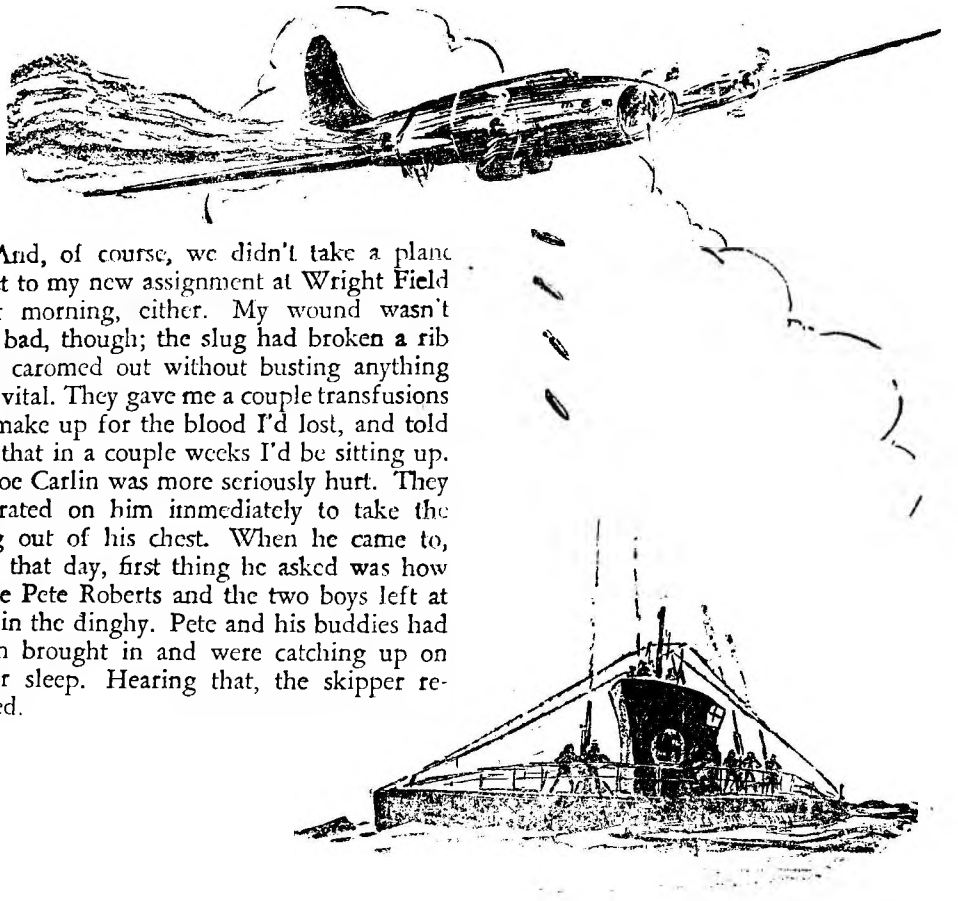
Soon as the medicos would permit, Joe sent for Pete. I'd had my cot wheeled into his room, and was there when Pete came in.

Pete looked kind of tense and uncertain, and his dark eyes were haggard. But when the skipper grinned and stuck out his hand, Pete took it, and Pete's young face lit up.

Joe said, "I wanted to thank you, Sergeant." His voice was still weak, but so full of feeling you couldn't mistake how deeply he felt. "I'm recommending you for a medal, of course. But what I really wanted to say is that I'll have to get another bomber crew together, pretty soon. And you're the first man I'm going to ask for."

Pete's dark eyes filled, and for a moment he couldn't talk and just stood there, wringing Joe's hand. The nurse made him leave, then. You should've seen the snappy salute he threw us!

Joe said to me, "You were right about Pete. I'm learning, I guess, that it takes a fight to really make a fighter!"



And, of course, we didn't take a plane west to my new assignment at Wright Field that morning, either. My wound wasn't too bad, though; the slug had broken a rib and caromed out without busting anything too vital. They gave me a couple transfusions to make up for the blood I'd lost, and told me that in a couple weeks I'd be sitting up.

Joe Carlin was more seriously hurt. They operated on him immediately to take the slug out of his chest. When he came to, late that day, first thing he asked was how were Pete Roberts and the two boys left at sea in the dinghy. Pete and his buddies had been brought in and were catching up on their sleep. Hearing that, the skipper relaxed.

"Just Like I Said—It Don't Pay to Have Friends in the Sheriffin' Business!"

JAIL DELIVERY

By OLIVER PRUDEN

Author of "Last Hanging on Hoss Thief Oak," etc.

THERE was trouble in the air. Drowsy Baker felt it when he came in the back door. It seemed to emanate from the Old Man, invisible yet tangible, like the heat coming from the oak chunks burning in the stove.

The Old Man continued to stand with his back to Drowsy. He was looking toward the figures in boots and sombreros that were gathered in small awed groups in front of Big-nose Charlie's joint. Their eyes were round and solemn. As they talked they glanced or gestured over their shoulders at the big bow of black ribbon tied to the locked door of the joint.

The ribbon appeared about to go sailing away in the north wind, but no one moved to make it secure. They seemed loath to touch it.

Then, with one accord, everyone looked down the street. Drowsy followed their eyes and saw a narrow-tired, high-wheeled Baines' wagon with no sideboards to the bed. The wagon moved against the wind, drawn by a big heavy work team whose forward set ears revealed an excited interest in town sights and smells.

Behind the driver's seat a worn, grease-spotted piece of an old tent covered an inconsiderable Something. The driver's face was set and grave. He was hunched so far forward, away from his load, that the tails of the team, streaming back in the wind, seemed to whip into his face.

Abruptly the wind played a grisly trick. It flipped up the bottom of the canvas. Everyone saw a pair of expensive boots, heels together but toes tilted weakly apart, forming a wide-branched Y. The boots of a man laying flat on his back, lifelessly jolting on the cold hard boards of the wagon bed. Everyone recognized the specially made boots. Big-nose Charlie's.

The same back draft that lifted the canvas wrenched the black bow loose from the door. The next gust whisked it away, rolling it like a tumbleweed.

The driver straightened up and looked about. His glance alternated between the flying ribbon, the big-bellied form outlined under the canvas, the serious faces of the cowpunchers. The driver's eyes were round and fearful, as if he had just beheld a supernatural sign. He opened his mouth tentatively.

He felt that the situation called for comment and his mouth hung open while he groped for suitable words.

But the words didn't come. He closed his mouth and turned the team around the corner. He appeared to withdraw into his ragged sheepskin coat like a turtle into its shell. He drove on toward the coroner's office with his load, his very back, like his face, set and grave.

THE sounds made by the iron tires were beyond hearing before the wagon was out of sight. Yet it was only when the tailgate finally vanished that Drowsy Baker again became aware of the tension, the friction, palpitating in the air. One of the oak chunks in the stove popped like a pistol shot.

The Old Man—few called him by his right name and title, Sheriff James Crane—still stood looking out the window. Drowsy could hear his badly-fitting store teeth click and rattle. Once the Old Man gestured with his heavy manzanita cane. The cane that was a gift from bushy-whiskered "Manzanita Moses," who had made it while he wintered in the county jail, under suspicion of being half-cracked.

Presently the Old Man jerked his head around and glanced shortly at Drowsy. Because of the swollen lids above, the puffy bags below, his venomous dark eyes appeared small as b'ar berries. They threw out a glitter that was as hard as the glitter of the diamonds that outlined the "S" in his solid gold star.

This star, by the way, this gaudy superde luxe showpiece, was also a gift. It had come from "My paymaster," as the Old Man, with a cynical cackle, had often referred to Big-nose Charlie. In addition to his joint and his string of cattle, Big-nose had a string of slot machines spotted about the county.

The Old Man's eyes locked with Drowsy's, then slid aside in the tell-tale fashion of one who bears malice.

"I've got a job for you," the Old Man said. As he went on he put the sarcastic grate in his voice. "It's a job that'll build your rep. It'll give you a chance to show the public what a hard-boiled chief dep'ity sheriff you are."

Drowsy drew in a quick breath, then held it as if he were counting ten. Just before coming into the office, he had taken off his star; at the moment his hand was closed around it in his pocket. Only a few moments before he had been hoping the Old Man would come out with one of his dirty cracks. That would give him the opening he wanted.

He had pictured to himself how he'd throw his star in the Old Man's face and tell him to stick it. Tell him to get somebody else to put up with his mean spells, his cranky spells, his crazy spells. Tell him that he was quitting so that he could file for sheriff on his own hook. Tell him that he'd just got the backing of the best people in the county, and that he was running against him in the next election. That jolt oughta just about make the Old Man bust a blood vessel!

He'd planned to rub it in. Planned to tell the Old Man how he'd snow him under at the election in November. Then, "Goodbye, you old so-and-so." And slam the door hard enough to vibrate the porcelain in his mouth.

Well, here was an opening to tell the Old Man everything that had been gathering

and festering in him for months. But something sinister was in the air and he hesitated. Hesitated.

The Old Man clicked his teeth and tapped at the floor, as if figuring out the meanest way to say whatever he had to say.

"Do you remember," the Old Man started off, "that young fellow that come in here a week or ten days ago? Tall, slim, kinda well set-up."

The Old Man threw back his shoulders and lifted his head, trying to impersonate the lively, reckless figure he visualized.

"He had snappin' black eyes and he looked like he might be quick on the trigger. You know, one of them fire-eatin' hotheads."

Drowsy wet his lips and took his hand off the star in his pocket. The Old Man was describing his friend, Tom Crooker. His throat tightened as he sensed some connection between Tom and the death of Bignose Charlie.

"What was he in about?" Drowsy feinted.

The Old Man turned almost black in the face as he whanged the floor with his cane and shouted his reply.

"How in hell should I know! He come in here and asked for you. The way some of them come in here and insist on you, anybody that didn't know might suppose you was the sheriff."

But a moment after he had declared his ignorance at the top of his voice, the Old Man was saying:

"I overheard this fellow tell something about his Angora goats dyin' of poison. As I got the drift of it, he was tryin' to make out that Big-nose Charlie was havin' strychnine and salt put out. The two of them have been scrappin' and squabblin' over the old Cristal Lear place. It seems this goat man browses his goats in the lava beds, then takes them to the Cristal Lear place for water.

"Hell, don't stand there lookin' like you been hit between the eyes! You can remember if you just stop and think. He said his name was Hooker? Booker? Tooker? Looker?

"You mean Crooker? Tom Crooker?"

"That's the name! Crooker! And it fits him right down to the ground, in case you want my opinion. By the way—" The Old Man got suddenly casual and suave, which warned Drowsy to be on his guard. He always got mealy-mouthed just before he sprung one of his nasty surprises.

DROWSY was fearful the Old Man had been tipped off about that conference that had broken up about two hours before. That conference in the ranch house, with the blinds down, where it had been arranged for Drowsy to run for sheriff against the Old Man.

Drowsy was about to haul out his star and quit before he would be fired, when the Old Man went on:

"Did I dream it, or did somebody tell me this Tom Crooker was a friend of yours?"

Drowsy answered warily. "I guess I know Tom Crooker about as well as I know anyone."

"Yeah?" Then the Old Man continued in a tone of ironic pity. "Well, that's too bad. Really too bad. Yuh know, when you've been in this business as long as me, you'll learn it don't pay to have friends. Gets you in some funny jams. Say, where did this Crooker come from in the first place?"

"He's from across the mountains. I wrote and told him the lava beds would be a good place to bring his goats to."

"Oh, you know him that well, huh? Then you oughta know what happened to his right hand. How'd he lose them fingers? Burn 'em off stealing a hot stove? Blow 'em off cracking a safe? Something like that?"

The skin whitened over Drowsy's jaw muscles. He jerked out his star. For a long moment he held it in his clenched hand. Then slowly, very slowly, he put it back into his pocket and wiped his palm on the sleeve of his brush jacket.

He looked over the Old Man's head at Big-nose Charlie's joint, and beyond, on into an unhappy distance. He kept his eyes remote as he started to answer in a carefully controlled voice.

"I'll tell you how Tom Crooker lost those fingers. A bunch of Indians went on a five-day drunk across the mountains and tried to raid one of the ranches. A fight started and the Indians ganged up on one fellow.

"They got him down and one of the Indians, named Shavehead, hauled out one of those wavy-edged bread knives. While the

other Indians held this fellow down, Shavehead got set to cut his throat."

"And I s'pose this Crooker feller lost his fingers when he pitched in to help the Indians."

Drowsy shot a glance at the Old Man that made him back up and act as if he were going to apologize for his sneer. Drowsy looked back into vacancy. A moment later he started speaking again.

"Tom Crooker made a grab for Shavehead's wrist. But what he got a hold on was the blade of that bread knife. But Tom didn't back out. He froze on to it like it was a broomstick. Or something like that that hadn't been whetted to an edge you could shave with.

"Shavehead gave the knife a twist and a jerk. Two of Tom's fingers dropped off like they didn't have any more bones in them than a coupla wienies. Those two fingers fell right in the face of the man that was down.

"When Shavehead got the knife out of Tom's hand, he got set again to finish off the man on the ground. Then Tom made a second grab. And maybe he made a third grab. Even a fourth. Nobody sees everything that goes on in a fight.

"Well, to make it short, when the fracas was over Tom didn't have anything left to grab with. His hand was carved up pretty much like you see it now."

Drowsy hesitated. For a moment he glumly studied the Old Man's red-and-purple countenance, his greedy eyes. Then he continued.

"Now I'm going to tell you the part of the story that'll make you call Tom a damn fool. Tom had nothing to gain by mixing in the fight. The fellow that was down wasn't the boss; he was poor as Job's turkey. He was just a $30-a-month-and-board hired hand. Tom helped him because he was a friend. He didn't stop to figger what he might, or might not, get out of it.

"Just one thing more. If Tom Crooker hadn't hung on to that knife as long as he had anything left to hang with, I wouldn't be here now. I'd be six feet under. I was the man that was down. I was the man that Shavehead was trying to finish off.

"So—now you know how Tom lost those four fingers and thumb."

The recital jolted the Old Man. He stood motionless, looking up at Drowsy, both hands resting on the manzanita cane, his old withered mouth a square hole.

When he spoke, there was a different tone in the Old Man's voice.

"It'd come to me in a round-about way that this fellow was a good friend of yours. Bu——" He shook his head with wonderment. Incomprehension. "I didn't think he was so much out of the ordinary as a friend."

"Well, he is," Drowsy replied. "I owe him my life."

The Old Man ruminated on this, his store teeth clicking slowly. Then he thumped the floor with his cane and hardened himself to his task.

"It all comes back to what I said awhile ago. It don't pay to have friends in this business. You never know when one of them will get crossed up and you have to go out and slap the handcuffs on him. Just like you now with your friend Tom Crooker."

The Old Man rushed on, as if afraid he'd relent if he paused to consider.

"Here's the job I got for you. Go out to Flowing Wells and bring in Tom Crooker. He's suspected of murder; an open-and-shut case."

"Who?" Drowsy swallowed and wet his lips. "Who?"

"You wouldn't be askin' 'who' if you'd just use your head for a minute. Just remember what Crooker come in to see you about, then you can dope out the whole thing. You know what he had to say about suspectin' Big-nose of being behind the goat poisoning. And you know how big and loud he talked about what he'd do if he found his suspicions c'rect."

"But that was just the talk of a man that was mad," Drowsy protested. "Tom couldn't. Why, before he left town he promised me to not even carry a gun!"

"Yeah? Well, he forgot about any promise he mighta made. Big-nose Charlie rode up on him while he was waterin' his goats at the Cristal Lear place last night. Crooker shot four times at Big-nose. Two of Big-nose's riders were with him and seen the shootin'.

"And I think—I'm not sure yet, but if my hunch is c'rect, we'll have a third eye-witness in Manzanita Moses. He's staying in the old house on the Cristal Lear place. And

I'm ready to bet my bottom dollar he was hid around some place and saw the whole show."

"It might be the other way 'round." Drowsy was grasping at straws. "Maybe Tom saw Manzanita Moses shoot—"

"Hell fire!" the Old Man exploded. "You talk like a man up a tree. You know what Manzanita is like as well as I do. When he was in jail here he just about lived on beans and mush; he wouldn't touch meat. No, and he wouldn't kill the bedbugs and graybacks, even when they was just swarmin' in his cell. Why, he's so careful about killin' anything he won't walk on green grass when he can hop from rock to rock.

"A man like Manzanita ain't shootin' anybody. Besides"—The Old Man now emphasized each word with a rap on the floor with his cane. "Tom Crooker come into the sheriff's office and publicly threatened to shoot Big-nose Charlie."

Drowsy dropped the argument. He knew when he was whipped.

The Old Man summed up.

"You know what your job is now. Tom Crooker is in that make-believe jail out at Flowing Wells. Doc Loomis has the key. It's sixty mile out there and back. You'd better get out there before that wild bunch at Flowing Wells gets a notion to have a little fun. You know—" He jerked a thumb up past one ear and made a grimace. "A little necktie party."

Drowsy stood looking at the Old Man. He wondered briefly if the Old Man had come to look as he did—bossy, mean-eyed, high-colored and hard-hearted—from seeing people, over a period of years, shrink, cow, and kow-tow before the Star of Authority.

The Old Man cocked his ears to hear a protest. He leaned forward on his cane, his hooked nose twitching. A mocking light wavered across his eyeballs as he started to speak in his mealy-mouthed tone.

"Of course, if you don't want to bring in the man that got crippled savin' your life—" a mirthless cackle burst from his sunken mouth—"you can just hand me that star right now and go back to where you come from."

This was pretty hard to take; Drowsy didn't trust himself to reply. He started, slowly and quietly, to button his brush jacket.

The Old Man hit the floor with his cane. His stringy dewlap trembled with his vehemence.

"I see what your answer is. That's all right with me. Perfectly all right!

"But there's one thing you'd better get clear. Don't go out there and just kinda turn this Crooker loose and think you can get away with it. Don't show up here empty-handed and expect me to fall for any escape story. I want a delivery *to* jail, not a delivery *from* jail.

"And if you don't show up at the jail with your friend, I'll prosecute you under every law in the land. Let that murderer get away and I'll give you a black-eye that you'll never live down. I'll run you down and cinch you if it's the last thing I ever do. And if there ain't enough laws to do it, I'll invent some.

"I got yuh!" the Old Man crowed and he bared his store teeth in a grin that was ugly to the point of obscenity. "I got yuh, whichever way the cat jumps. I'll learn yuh to hive up in a backroom with the psalm singers and plan to cut my throat. I'll learn yuh!"

He paused to drive in the sting of this speech with a gloating leer. Then he gave the floor a triumphant wallop with his cane and clicked his store teeth.

As he went out the door, Drowsy noted that even the back of his neck had turned red-purple.

So—he had found out about the conference!

Drowsy stood slowly and thoughtfully pinning his star back in place. Then, rousing himself, he went out the back door, mounted his horse, and headed toward Flowing Wells.

DROWSY BAKER went by the back road to the edge of Flowing Wells and stopped beside a big digger pine. Just ahead of him perched up there alone in the rocks, stood the comical little twelve-by-fourteen wooden jail.

For a space Drowsy watched the side and back windows that were visible to him. He expected any moment to see Tom Crooker's face appear behind the lengths of black-iron water pipe that served for bars. Drowsy had a vague idea, a wild hope, that he could read at that distance guilt or innocence in

Tom's face, and foretell his own future from what he read.

If he read innocence, everything might be worked out happily. Possibly he could start next week to ride about the county, talking to voters and tacking up signs.

But if he read guilt— Drowsy shook his head as if rejecting the thought. He couldn't forget that he owed an unpaid debt to Tom Crooker. He couldn't forget that Tom had given him a hand, both figuratively and literally, when he needed it. It hadn't occurred to him that he could handle the situation as the Old Man might—look out for Number One and to hell with everybody else.

Drowsy twitched the bridle reins. He rode down to the forks of the road and around the corner of the restaurant. He now caught his first glimpse of Tom. He was looking out the front jail window, his good left hand grasping the bar beside his face.

When he saw Drowsy, Tom stuck forth his crippled hand and waved excitedly.

"Hi-yuh, slow poke!" Tom's voice joyful. "When are you gittin' me out of this corncrib?"

Drowsy answered in a minor tone.

"Just as quick as I can saddle you a horse and get the jail key."

"The quickest way you can get me out of here is too damn slow."

For all that it was joyful, Drowsy noted that Tom's voice was high-pitched and strained. It was a tone he had heard before. The tone of a guilty man trying to put on a cheerful front.

He found his mouth turning dry as he rode diagonally across the road toward the doctor's office, back under the long porch of B. K. Holman's store.

THE big lock on the jail door opened its jaw with a single, solid click deep in its bronze chest. The hasp, forged from an old wagon tire, fell and wagged briefly to and fro in the groove it had scratched in the wood. As the door was shoved inward, the bottom scraped and stuttered on the jail-house floor.

Tom Crooker stepped out.

In the full sunlight Drowsy took one brief, close look at Tom's face. The color had drained away until the tanned skin looked yellow. Drowsy noted the pinched lines beside the mouth, the sucked in lips that twitched and trembled.

To keep Tom from reading his own face, Drowsy stooped down and lifted one front hoof of his horse. He put the hoof between his knees. The brim of his sombrero hid his face as he started probing around the frog for a non-existent pebble.

Tom swallowed visibly and audibly a couple of times; he shifted from foot to foot and shivered like he was cold. He was plainly anxious to speak, to explain himself. Finally he squatted close to Drowsy and tried vainly to look up under the hat brim to see his eyes.

"It looks like I'm really in for it this time. Huh?" Tom's tone pleaded for contradiction, for some straw of hope. "It don't look good. Huh?"

Drowsy raised his eyes from the hoof. Three feet away Tom squatted, arms resting across his knees, the crippled hand so close, so awfully close and shaking.

Drowsy met Tom's gaze, and what he saw hit him in the pit of the stomach. Tom's eyes were just two black pools of worry, and the dumb way they begged for reassurance was a little more than he could calmly endure.

Drowsy set the hoof down and stood wiping his palms on his thighs.

"Oh, things are never so bad they couldn't be worse."

Even as he spoke Drowsy ground his teeth in disgust with himself. He couldn't have been more off-hand with a hobo he was taking to jail for chicken stealing.

Drowsy picked up the reins of the other horse and handed them to Tom.

"Are we heading for below?" Tom jerked a thumb in the direction of the county seat.

Drowsy nodded.

"Do you think we can make it by the county road before it gets too dark?"

Drowsy quit fussing with the latigo of a cinch that was already tight. He looked inquiringly across his saddle at Tom.

"I was kinda thinking of taking the cut-off," Drowsy offered. "Ford South Battle Creek at the old Morgan place and—and on out that way."

"You mean—" Tom paused to swallow. "You mean, come out by way of the old Cristal Lear place?"

Drowsy occupied himself with the strings that bound part of a sack of barley to the back of his saddle.

"If you've any objections to going that way—"

"No." Then there was a flash of the old reckless Tom Crooker spirit. "What in hell difference does it make now?"

Tom, his nostrils flaring, sent a look of hate in the direction of the half dozen citizens who had sidled up close to the jail. With unwholesome, pitiless curiosity shining in their eyes, their foolish mouths agape, their whole being mirrored an unclean hunger which nothing but the sordid, dirty details of a poor devil's misfortunes could satiate.

Tom tossed his crippled hand in a pot-after-the-handle gesture.

"What the hell difference does it make now? If I've got what it takes to shoot a man, I oughta have what it takes to go past the place where I shot him."

He spit the words into the faces of the curious citizens, casting them from him as if they were unclean. They gulped the tidbit with gluttonous relish and licked their chops. They edged nearer, looking for more of the same.

But the words clanged dismally on Drowsy's consciousness. This was a confession! He gradually lost color. His face took on the expression of a man who is watching his house burn down.

Some of the on-lookers commented about how Drowsy's shoulders drooped as he rode down the road with his friend, Tom Crooker, at his side.

AS THEY descended into the canyon of South Battle Creek, Tom was speaking, easing his burden by confessing.

"—I got so mad I saw red. Maybe you've never got that mad. I used to think it was just a way of speaking. But I found out that if you get mad enough, everything looks like you was seeing it through red-colored glasses.

"That evening when I was watering the goats, Big-nose showed up. He was so drunk he could hardly set in the saddle. Two of his riders kinda dodged along behind him, ridin' close together and lookin' foolish.

"Big-nose set his dogs on the goats. They got one down and started killin' it. I hollered. But when Big-nose seen I didn't have a gun or anything, he started cussin' me for everything he could lay his tongue to. The leather strap he had under his chin to hold his hat on made his fat face look exactly like a hog's.

"An' he just went on and on, frothin' at the mouth about all the squaw grass the goats was trompin' down. Why, you could stick in your eye all the grass that grows in them rocks.

"All the time the dogs were yelpin' and the goat's bawls had that sound of blood in the throat. I tell you everything got red. Redder'n hell. I run to the house for the rifle I'd traded to Manzanita Moses for herdin' the goats for a month—"

The roar of the water, to Drowsy's relief, now muffled most of what Tom said, making it unintelligible.

When he rode up out of the icy water on to the opposite bank, he glanced back at Tom, now speaking more excitedly than ever. His eyes were burning bright; his cheeks were flushed pink, but he was white and trembling about the mouth.

Drowsy dropped his eyes and concentrated on the front hooves of Tom's horse. He observed how they had been washed noticeably clean by the water; the raw spots where the hair met the hooves, skinned to the quick by the rocks, now starting to bleed again; the soaked tail and fetlocks dribbling irregular streaks of wetness up the trail.

"—I don't know why he didn't drop at the first shot. That old gun shoots true as a die. It was a moving shot, but not as hard to hit as a deer. He was on that fancy-prancin' black-and-white horse with the glass eye.

"At the first shot the riders high-tailed. But Big-nose set there kinda staggerin' in the saddle, while his horse pranced, until the fourth shot. Then he let out a beller. And, my God, what a beller! You coulda heard him clear to the top of Inskip Butte.

" 'I'm shot! I'm shot!' he bawled. He leaned low over the horn of his saddle an' lit out after his riders. And noise! You never heard so many rocks rollin' or brush crackin' in all your life.

"I went over to beat the dogs off. But they'd give up and followed. The goat was dead and the skin was too chewed up to save."

THEY topped the bank and came out on the sloping flat. A coyote, the one in a thousand that will act fearless as a house dog, paused beside the fragment of an old picket fence. Drowsy rode close enough to note the odd triangle of black hair, no bigger than his thumb-nail, that grew right where the tail and backbone joined.

Something about the sharp nose, the jaws, wide and powerful at the hinges, the feather-footed air of self-reliance, slyness, and cruelty, recalled the Old Man.

The closing words of Tom's recital stamped the picture on Drowsy's memory as enduringly as a branding iron scars a steer's hide.

"—I didn't mean to kill him. I swear I didn't. Besides, I'd found out he wasn't puttin' out strychnine and salt. The goats were pickin' up some milkweed that grows around the waterholes, and that was what was killing them.

"I oughta jist natchally go and hang my fool self. I've never been worth a damn on earth for anything but to get my friends in trouble."

The moon was rising when they rode through a gap in the rock fence that enclosed the clearing on the abandoned homestead that was the Cristal Lear place.

As monuments—or headstones—to his hopes, and to his stern battles with the rocky ground, Cristal Lear had managed to erect a patch-work house, and to plant two Lombardy poplars by the tiny spring. Also there was a barn, and a garden spot fenced with pickets laboriously split from the tough-working yellow pines that grew in the edge of the lava beds.

The buildings and fences were going the way such things go on an abandoned place. All signs of Cristal Lear's long days of labor were being leveled and covered by the quiet forces of Life and Decay. Most of the barn roof had vanished; white oaks and brush were sprouting in the clearing, growing swiftly in the once-tilled soil.

Everything, save the two Lombardy poplars, was on the road to joining the dust of the man who had starved and struggled there.

Since being abandoned, the house had been used and abused. Few of those who had sheltered there had done much to stay the progress of decay. It was as if they regarded the house as a toppled headstone, which they left for more interested parties to set aright.

The place had reached the right state of dilapidation to be haunted. Probably because there was no homeless ghost just then, Manzanita Moses had gathered up his manzanita staff and his big horn comb and moved in.

Drowsy quietly stopped in front of the barn.

"I've got a little horse feed," he said. "We'll put the horses in the barn and put up with Manzanita tonight."

For about the first time, Drowsy looked straight into Tom's face. A long, meaningful look. Then he added:

"A horse with some grain in his belly has got more bottom and can travel faster."

He cleaned the trash of a woodrat's nest out of the feed box in one of the stalls. Then he put most of the rolled barley into the box.

"Tie up in here," he told Tom, "where your horse can get to this grain."

After they had settled their horses for the night, they threw the warm, damp saddle blankets over their shoulders and went to the house.

Neither knocking on the door, tapping on a window pane with a four-bit piece, or repeated calls, brought any response from Manzanita Moses. Evidently he was out on one of his moonlight rambles.

They opened the door and lit matches to find their way across the uneven kitchen floor, up the three rickety steps, and into the low-ceilinged back room. The coals of a white oak chunk glowed dimly in the lava rock fireplace.

They stirred the fire into a blaze, illuminating the smoky, newspaper covered walls with flickering light.

TOM, now silent but not trembling, squatted on the rock hearth and prepared to make a cigarette. He adjusted a wrinkle in the thigh of his pants to the right proportions. Then he shaped a paper in the wrinkle and shook in the tobacco. He lifted it out with his left hand and rolled it between the thumb and forefinger into a perfect cylinder.

Drowsy cleared his throat.

"Do you think—" He paused to cough. "Do you think a man could make it from

here down through the mountains to Old Mexico?"

"What started you wonderin' about that?"

"Oh, nothing—much. But I've often wondered why a fellow on the dodge didn't stick to the hills and the timber. It strikes me as safer than going near towns or railroads."

Drowsy got to his feet and started making the saddle blankets into a bed in front of the fireplace. As a substitute for a mattress, he carefully spread his own blanket down on the boards. He put Tom's blanket on top for cover.

Drowsy pulled off his boots and arranged them on the floor for a pillow, covering them with the edge of the saddle blanket. Then he lay down and stretched out.

"I got an idea," he said, forcing a yawn, "that I'll sleep like a log tonight."

"Does the floor feel kinda soft?"

Tom glanced humorously at Drowsy. Then his whole manner changed.

"Oh—" he exclaimed in an odd tone. He grasped a thought that was unspoken, that was projected into the air.

"I savvy what you mean," Tom said. He turned slowly and stood looking into the fire.

He was still thoughtful as he hung on to the mantel with his good hand, while he worked his boots off, using the toe of the opposite foot for a bootjack.

"You know what I oughta do?" Tom asked. "I oughta climb that biggest poplar with a riata. Then tie one end to a limb and the other to my neck and jump out. I've never been worth a damn for anything but to get in trouble an' drag my friends in with me."

THE nicker of a horse, muffled by walls and distance, partly wakened Drowsy Baker. With eyes shut he stirred on the hard boards, frowning at the discomfort. Shivering, he felt about for Tom's saddle blanket, trying to pull it toward his shoulders. When he found himself clutching for something that wasn't there, he came awake with a rush.

Yellow sunlight was slanting through the dingy panes of the window. The oak chunk had burned down to a nub that sent a curling tendril of smoke hustling up through the white ashes that covered it.

The strong odor of the room, the aged and blended odors of wood smoke, of ordinary tobacco burned in four-bit briers and corn-cobs, of not-too-clean earthy, male humans, lay, not unpleasantly, on the back of his tongue.

Out in the barn his horse continued to nicker as if calling its mate. Tom was gone. There was not even a print of his form on the sweat-stiffened saddle blanket spread out on the floor.

"Humph! Guess I slept like a log, after all!"

Drowsy was stamping about, getting his cold feet settled in his boots, when the door resounded to a knock. After his second call to "Come in!" the door was shoved open hesitantly.

Manzanita Moses. Long hair. Long whiskers. Thin blue shirt, bib overalls, and no underwear. No socks, bare feet thrust into the roughly made brogans that were fastened with black steel buckles.

Beyond him in the kitchen Drowsy could see white steam coming from the spout of the tea-kettle on the stove. And above the door, resting in rude limb crotches, like something out of the picture of a frontier cabin, the rifle. The Rifle.

"Won't you come in and sit down to breakfast with me?" Manzanita asked simply and humbly.

Drowsy sat outside on a bench, in the full light and indifferent warmth of the autumn sun. His elbows were resting on his knees, his face in his palms. About every ten minutes he spit slowly into the dirt between his feet. Then, with equal time-killing deliberation, he rubbed the spit into nothingness with a boot sole.

If he was going to high-tail it, he knew that he should be on his way. He prefigured how he should take a long ride through the mountains. As he thought of it he could see himself looking apprehensively behind, jumping if he heard a twig snap.

Eventually—if he evaded the Old Man—he would land far off, probably flat-broke, surely among strangers. And there, instead of electioneering about the county, tacking signs to trees and horse troughs, he'd have to drearily seek some dollar-a-day-and-board ranch job.

Drowsy hesitated, slowly shook his head, and spit again.

He'd wait. Put it off. Wait. Wait until the stage for Flowing Wells came by. That was an idea! The driver would have the news from the livery stable and the saloons. Yes! That's what he'd do. He'd wait and ask what the Coroner's jury had decided.

Drowsy lifted his face out of his palms and looked at Manzanita Moses on the other end of the bench. Manzanita was combing his hair back from his narrow, slightly dished, forehead, while his eyes mirrored placid approval of the scene, the tumbled lava flows and the black-green bulk of Inskip Butte. A scene as masculine as whiskey or fist-fighting.

Long before the stage was due, Drowsy, followed by the comb-plying Manzanita, strolled out to the county road.

The tough little mice-like mules that pulled the stage were familiar with their driver's penchant for gabbing. Of their own accord, they stopped opposite Drowsy and Manzanita.

"Howdy! Howdy, Sheriff!" A lively grin moved under the coarse black stubble on the driver's face and shone brightly in his friendly dark eyes. He was a tobacco chewer; the evidence was visible all over his shirt front.

He looked as if he were just bursting to tell some good news but was holding it in suspense, wanting Drowsy to guess what it was, wanting Drowsy to worm it out of him bit by bit.

"Well, how does it feel to step into the sheriff's shoes?"

Drowsy frowned with irritation. He rebuffed the driver's friendliness by asking shortly:

"How many bullet holes did the Coroner find in Big-nose Charlie?"

"Why— Ah-pit-choo! Why, Sheriff, nary a one, for sure, so far. He's got a hole in his left temple but I heard them talkin' they couldn't find ary bullet. They got something out of the hole that looked like white oak bark, maybe. Or something like that. They flagged the limited and sent it to Frisco to get it analyzed."

"What's the talk?"

The driver broke in happily:

"The talk is that you'll make the best sheriff the county ever had!"

"For cripes sake lay off that sheriff stuff."

The outburst didn't dim the eagerness shining in the driver's countenance. He mulled his cud slowly, smugly certain he carried overbearing news that would make Drowsy sorry he had got mad.

"I guess," the driver teased, "the big news ain't got out to you here yet. Huh?"

Drowsy supposed news of the conference had spread, grown, and that he was now to have the stage driver's version, fresh from the livery stable. Drowsy looked at him crossly, and it exasperated him to see the driver's grin remain wide and bright.

"I know what you're hinting at," Drowsy growled. "You'll oblige me if you'll keep your damn trap shut."

"So," the driver crowed, "you don't want to hear anything about the Old Man droppin' dead."

"Dead? *Dead!* Aw, hell, you're fooling!"

"Think so, huh? Guess the Old Man wishes I was foolin'. He keeled over on the courthouse steps about five-thirty this morning, and if he ain't dead he's sure playing 'possum mighty good."

"That don't jibe with what I know about the Old Man. He's never around the courthouse at five-thirty in the morning."

"He was—ah-pit-choo!—this morning."

"What for?"

"I guess he was lockin' up that prisoner you sent in."

"Huh-uh?"

"I said he was lockin' up—" The stunned amazement showing in Drowsy's face had its effect on the driver.

"What are you actin' so surprised about? You did send him in, didn't you?"

"Sent who in? What are you talking about?"

"Why, hell far, man! That feller that shot Big-nose Charlie. You know, that goat man. Tom Crooker, ain't it? You turned him loose and sent him in to give himself up, didn't you?"

"Y-yes. Yes, I did!"

Drowsy's voice rang false, and after a sidelong look the driver turned his eyes to the brush for a moment.

"Well, that's what this one-handed feller said, anyway."

Then he went on.

"I guess this feller musta said or done something that made the Old Man mad. They say that when he come out from lock-

in' him up, the Old Man's face was all red and blue like the head of a struttin' turkey. He was about halfway down the steps when he bust a blood vessel. The doc says he was probably dead afore he hit. The talk is, you'll be appointed sheriff now.

"Why don't you — ah-pit-choo! — read your letter?"

"What letter?"

"Why, hell far, the letter I give—" The driver broke off abruptly and looked foolish.

"Now, wouldn't that curl your whiskers for you! I'd forgit my head if it wasn't screwed on good. Tom Crooker woke me up and give me this letter afore he went to the Old Man's. He said I was to hand it to you in case I met you anywheres along the road."

Drowsy extended his hand, and he kept it from shaking noticeably as he received the letter. He recognized Tom's uneven left-handed scrawl, and he turned his back while he opened it.

His eyes gulped it, paragraph at a time.

I really started for Old Mexico and rode that way as far as the Tuscan Buttes. Then I got to thinking that if you come in without me for a prisoner you'd maybe lost your job.

You got a chance to get away from working for a dollar a day. People I have talked to think you are all right. It wouldn't surprise me if you were sheriff yourself some day. Don't say I am crazy but keep this bee in your bonnet.

I've never been worth a damn for anything. I got in this mess by myself and I'll get out of it the same way.

I am going to tell the Old Man you turned me loose and sent me in. In case you get this you will know what kind of a story to have ready.

Bring me a sack of smoking when you get in.

Yours truly,
Tom Crooker.

Drowsy turned around.

The driver appraised Drowsy's countenance and observed.

"Good news, huh? Well, that's the kind I like to bring people. Sez I—"

Drowsy interrupted.

"What," he asked, "is the talk about this hole in Big-nose's temple? And the bark, and so forth?"

"Oh! Almost forgot that. Why, they're guessin' that maybe Crooker didn't hit him ary shot after all. They're guessin' that Big-nose only thought he was hit and rode slam-bang into a low oak limb. They're guessin' that a knot, maybe, stuck out just right to poke a hole in his temple. Riders have been killed in funnier ways than that."

"Yes, I guess that way, too."

"W'elp. I got a long ways to go yet. Come on, mules! Ah-pit-choo!"

Droplets of the last spluttering ejaculation touched Drowsy's cheek, cool and odorous of chewing plug.

DROWSY stood opposite the mound of rocks that was piled where the Cristal Lear road met the county road. He had his knuckles planted on his hips, washer-woman style, while he watched the mud-spattered running gear and flapping side curtains of the stage rumble on toward Flowing Wells.

"Sheriff!" he muttered to himself. "About to be appointed sheriff, and my best friend in the jail."

The stage went down a slope and out of sight. Drowsy turned toward the house, followed by Manzanita Moses. Each plodded in a separate wheel rut. Dividing them was the second-growth brush in the middle of the road, scraped and roughly trimmed to the same general height by the passing axles of wagons and buggies.

It was evident that there was a more marked division in the tenor of their thoughts. Drowsy's troubled eyes were fixed on the rut some fifteen feet ahead of his boots. Manzanita strode in his unhurried way, placidly combing his whiskers while he looked at the rugged hog-back rising back of the house.

They came around a turn to find an old doe standing in the road just ahead. She was looking back over her shoulder with big liquid-black eyes, her ears set toward them like listening trumpets. She pertly frisked her stub tail in their faces; then she trotted out to one side and started picking up acorns.

"Is that one of your pets?" Drowsy asked.

"They are all my pets," Manzanita replied quietly.

"Why don't you take that rifle and knock

over some of these old does?" Drowsy guyed him. "You oughta be eating venison all winter long."

Manzanita Moses stopped dead in his tracks. Horrified.

"I wouldn't shed blood!"

"What did you get that rifle for?"

"I don't know. I really don't know. Tom just forced it on me because he didn't have money to pay me my month's wages.

"Why, the very evening he gave it to me, I didn't wait to eat supper. I sat right down and started taking all the bullets out of the shells. I didn't stop until I'd pulled out the very last one. Then I stuck paper wads in the shells to keep the powder from spilling and put them back in the gun."

"You mean that rifle is loaded with blanks?"

"Is that what you call blanks? I don't know. All I know is you couldn't hurt a deer with that gun. Except that it might make a noise, that rifle wouldn't hurt any living thing any more than if you pointed a finger.

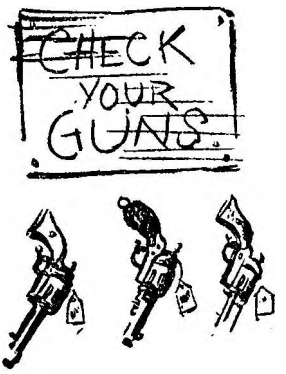
"What did you whoop like that for? You sound just like a wild Comanche."

Drowsy gave another whoop. And at the same time he actually tried to jump into the air and crack his heels together before he lit.

"I know a fellow that wants a sack of smoking that'll be glad to know what you just said. Watch my smoke!"

He lit out for the barn like he was ten years old again. A few minutes later he went down the road toward the county seat, the hind hooves of his horse throwing up lumps of dirt.

Manzanita Moses shook his head. Then he went on toward the house, placidly combing his beard with the big horn comb.

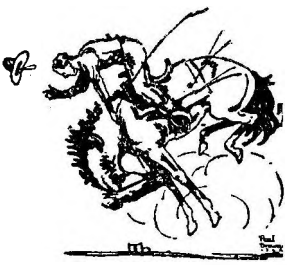


Beginning in our next issue . . . . a new serial of one of SHORT STORIES favorite characters, that cattle country Thunderbolt in pants, that Red Head from Tulluco whose Daddy taught him manners and shootin'

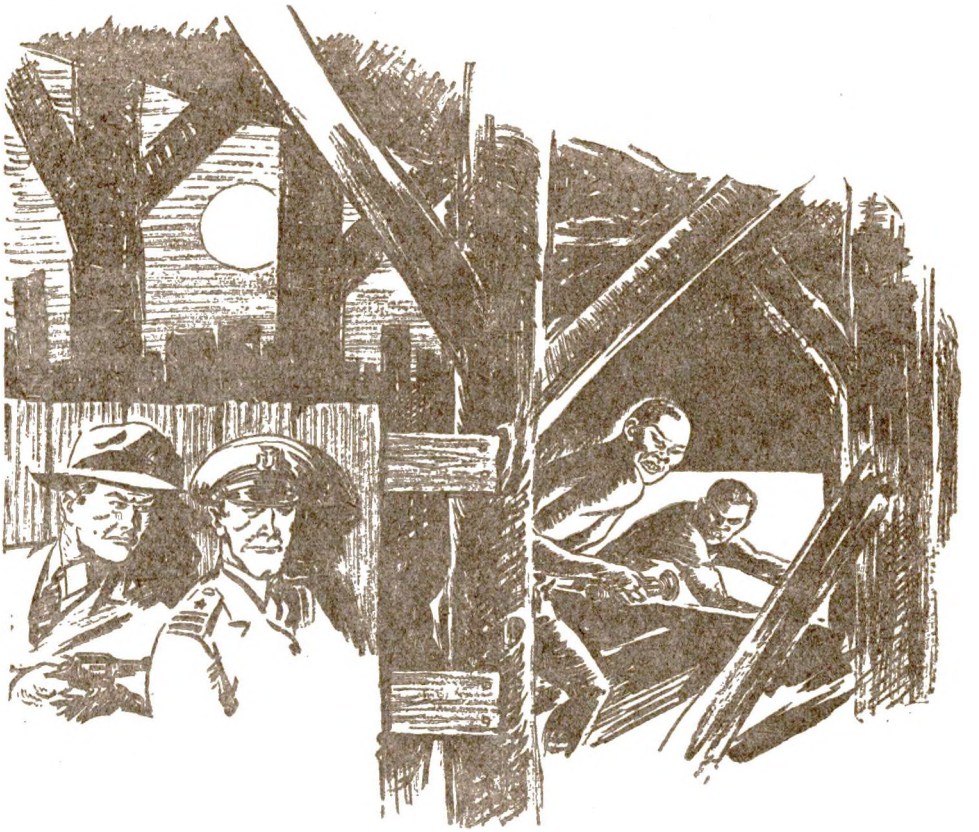
RED CLARK AT THE SHOWDOWN

by

Gordon Ray Young



You're Looking for Trouble; Trouble Is Relative—Even Death



No Evidence Needed

By ROBERT H. LEITFRED

MAYBE the Marines can get along without me since I'm only a lieutenant of detectives in a Pacific waterfront town. But when I get a printed brochure revealing how decrepit and unimportant I am from a physical standpoint, I see red, purple and a lot of other shades they ain't yet discovered in the rainbow.

So I'm feeling low as I sit behind my desk at detective headquarters in San Pedro, home of our Pacific Fleet. Outside I can hear the clatter of machinery in the shipyards, and the occasional blast of tugs in the harbor.

Horall, Police Commissioner, is holding down a chair between my desk and Captain McGrath's, my superior in the detective bureau. He's smoking a cigar.

"What did you expect, Larsen," he says, "a 1-A rating?"

I tell him patiently for the third time, "4-F is what the Board medics give me. I figure there's politics mixed up in that kind of rating. You and McGrath know damn well there's nothing wrong with me physically. Sure, I'm marked with scars. My knees and ankles have been wrenched till they're knobby. Most of my ribs have been cracked one time or another. And I've had a couple fractures in my skull. So what does it add up to?"

The Commissioner grins. "4-F, Chris." The grin fades. He points the cigar at me.

"Look at it this way, Chris. The force has lost scores of men through draft and enlistment. Numbers have gone into jobs that pay more than the department rate."

"Dough doesn't interest me. I want service in the Marines."

The Commissioner gets to his feet. "I'm sorry, Chris," he says. "I didn't know you felt this way. I'll see Major Tenvold in a few days and see what can be done about that physical rating. Is that fair enough?"

Horall's a square Police Commissioner and I know he means it. "That's swell, Commissioner," I tells him. "I'm fed up battling with crooks. I want to take on some Japs. You know how it is."

Horall goes to the window and looks outside. "I know how it is, Chris. My youngest kid is in the Gilberts right now."

After the Commissioner leaves, McGrath snaps, "Forget it, Chris."

I'm thinking up an appropriate comeback when the phone rings. I pick up my receiver, and so does the captain. We both listen in. There's been a fire in the Doheny warehouse. It's a routine report from Fire Chief Riordan except for one detail. He says there's a dead man inside the building. It calls for investigation.

"Take it, Chris," orders McGrath. "You need something to do."

I pick up my car from the basement garage and drive to Pier 37 where the Doheny warehouse is located. There's no one around the place except two squad car boys and Chief Riordan.

"The place was equipped with automatic fire extinguishers," Riordan reports. "All we had to do was to shut off the valves. You'll find the one casualty in the main office."

I thank him and pass inside the gate. The office is on the second floor. It smells of hemp, tar and stale smoke. I look for the body and find it. One glance satisfies me that the victim was not only dead, but fiendishly mutilated. The man is curled up in a semi-circle of charred flooring, his face, chest and abdomen burned to shapelessness. Yet his back shows no signs of burns.

Kneeling down, I paw at the body. My hands get fouled. This don't bother me none since I'm used to it. I twist the head to one side and find half of a silver chain that must have hung around the dead man's neck. I also find an odd-shaped bronze key which evidently had once hung on the silver chain.

While I'm pocketing the key I see more metal. I push an elbow aside and pick up a flat chunk of lead which has melted, then cooled. This, also, I put in my pocket. Still on my knees I look at walls and ceiling. They are charred all right, but not enough to burn away half of a human body. I can't figure the source of the heat unless it came from a blowtorch. And this don't seem logical.

After a minute I phone McGrath and explain a few of the facts. Certain others I keep to myself. In three minutes the siren's wail can be heard ten blocks away. With McGrath comes the whole staff of experts including Healy the Medical Examiner.

Healy is shaking his head as he gets out his instruments. "It's remarkable what one human being will do to another," he observes. "I would state, even before going further into this mess, that there is no doubt that here is a classic example of a paranoic—"

"Skip the lecture," advises McGrath. "Give out facts."

"You and Larsen," continues Healy, unperturbed. "Always in a hurry. Make the examination. Find out who killed him. And why." He squints through his glasses, flexes what's left of arms and legs, and starts doing some arithmetic. "Dead about seven hours I'd say offhand without examining the organs. Instantaneous. Bullet went through the skull at a sharp angle from upper anterior entrance downward to lower posterior exit. Should be here in this room. The bullet I mean. Burns are of an unusual nature. Terrific heat in a concentrated area. Recognition may prove impossible. Only unusual angle is the lack of burns on rear portions of cadaver."

He blinks at me through his glasses. "Any questions?"

"How about frisking him?"

Healy is putting away his instruments. "That's not my job."

McGrath gives orders. Pictures are taken. Measurements are made. The experts frisk the body, and find a couple coins and a knife in a hip pocket.

I move back until my shoulders touch the wall. Then I get a hunch. The bullet had passed through the victim's head from the

forehead downward to a spot near the nape of the neck though Healy don't express it quite that way. This was possible if the dead man had been kneeling and his killer stood in front of him. But if he was on his feet, the bullet would have to come from a gun held higher than the reach of a normal sized man.

My eyes move up the barnlike wall and focus on a ventilating window near the ceiling, and I see a neat hole where a bullet had drilled the glass. Murder from the outside. This calls for leg work.

Captain McGrath is searching for the bullet. He don't notice me as I ease out of the room. I pass through the gate and walk into an alley to an adjoining building. A door is open. I pass through and climb three flights of steps to the roof.

From the wall at the roof's edge I can look down at the ventilating window. The tar on top of the wall is soft. Here I find a hollow where something the size of a broom handle or a rifle stock has rested. I look for something else and it ain't there.

DOWN the steps I go to the alley. Near a power-line pole I find what I'm looking for—a brass cartridge shell casing. I'm bent over when I find it. When I straighten I'm aware of somebody behind me. I weave sideways and drop to my knees. Something cracks the side of my skull.

Lights explode inside my head. I shake off the pain. Maybe I stagger as I twist around. I see him then—a hulking man wearing a sport coat. The brim of his hat is pulled low, but not low enough to conceal his mean eyes. The gun butt hits me again pinning my right ear back in a way I don't like.

A deep well opens up in the alley. I'm on the edge. Swell. I'll drop into it. I lean forward. A hand draws me back. I see an uplifted arm and the glint of bluish metal. I let him have it, a right jab to the mouth. He staggers and I make a grab at him. My fingers slide down his arm and hook into the pocket of his coat. Then the sky drops on me and I pass out cold.

In a couple minutes I'm sitting up. The Doheny building is rocking queerly on its foundations. There's pain in my head and bitterness in my heart. I'm all fed up with battling tough waterfront mobs. Why can't they use their belligerent talents on the Nazis or the Japs. No. They gotta beat me up which means that the Examining Board will never pass me as fit for duty even if the Commissioner thinks they ought to.

My knees are like rubber. I walk in circles which is all right, too, for it gives me a chance to find something that I might have missed. There's a torn patch pocket on the ground and near it a penny, a hell of a big penny about the size of a silver dollar. I pick it up by the edge and lay it on my handkerchief.

It's a copper disk. I look around for the shell and it ain't around which I knew it wouldn't be. Then I find my car and drive to Headquarters.

On the way I turn on the radio. Routine stuff. I listen to the news. Russkies advancing. Navy Task Force at Formosa. News is good. I feel better. Navy reports five Liberty ships explode in Pacific. Fire in holds. Now I don't feel so good for I know it ain't reasonable for ships to catch on fire while at sea. I'm still mulling this over when I reach Headquarters.

Wagner in the Ballistics Bureau is only mildly interested when I hand him the copper disk. "This all?" he asks.

"No," I tell him. "I had a shell casing. A .348 cartridge. I lost it."

Wagner looks at me kinda funny. "Ummm!" he grunts. "Captain McGrath found the bullet in the floor. It was shot from a big game rifle. The bullet matches the shell casing you lost."

I take the chunk of lead from my pocket. "Put this with the rest," I tell him, "and look for prints on the disk. Got something else," I adds, holding out the bronze key. "You're plenty smart. Tell me if it means anything to you."

Wagner examines the key, even puts it under a strong magnifying glass. "This key," he states, "was never made to spring a lock. The design is Oriental. That's all I can tell you."

This goes right over my head. It still don't mean anything even when I get two reports. One from the people of the Doheny warehouse. The dead man was no employee of theirs. The second from Healy at the morgue. The body was definitely that of an Oriental. Whether Japanese or Chinese, it could not be determined.

All this is interesting, but it doesn't make sense. Nothing does until I get Wagner's report. Two prints were found on the copper disk. One could not be identified from local files. But the second proof could be and was. It was made by a harbor squatter name of Josef Gorski.

IT'S almost dusk when I get around to check on Gorski. He lives on a houseboat at the lower end of the harbor. There's a narrow plank bridge stretched from the mainland to the aft deck of the houseboat. I cross it and raise my fist to knock on the door. The Yale padlock on the outside indicates nobody's home.

The location interests me. I look around and see a flat-bottom rowboat fastened to a piling. The center seat is covered with dried fish scales. And in the compartment beneath it I find a rusty knife, a scaler and a new rope with grappling hooks attached.

I play with the rope and wonder what use Gorski might have with grappling hooks. A Coast Guard boat prowls down the channel. Its swells set the houseboat rocking.

Gorski don't come. It gets dark. I'm still playing with the rope. Looking at the hooks on the end of it gives me an idea—a kind of a screwy idea. Suppose Gorski had something he wanted to hide. Maybe a rifle. What better place than the harbor bottom close to his houseboat?

Too obvious, I figure. A guy with brains—but did Gorski have much in the way of brains? His police record shows him to be a squatter and petty thief. There's thousands of his breed along every waterfront. Still, acting on orders from somebody else, he might do that very thing.

I'm whirling the rope close to my knees and feeling kinda foolish. I give it a big swing and let go one end. The grappling hooks splash and settle to the bottom. I haul in. Maybe six times I try it in different locations. I don't even snag an old shoe.

In the lee of the houseboat cabin I light a cigarette and let the rope slide easy over the side. When my cigarette's half gone, I flick it into the water. I'm tired of waiting for Gorski. I haul on the rope and it snags on something. The hooks slip, then take a solid hold. I haul up carefully and find at the other end a wooden box tied with manila rope.

It's easy to cut the rope and rip off the box cover. My pencil flash reveals a dozen quart-sized bottles wrapped in transparent, waterproof coverings. The box is from a chemical plant in New Jersey, the contents are labeled, PICRIC ACID.

Picric Acid is dangerous stuff. It's used in making TNT. What use could an ignorant rat like Gorski make of this chemical? An icy chill crawls up my spine. Somebody with brains is behind Gorski. I see again that huddled, partly-cremated figure in the warehouse. It's not easy to forget a sight like that. It could so easy happen to me.

Carefully, so as to leave no trace of my visit, I pocket the grappling rope. The manila rope I tuck under the loosened cover of the box which I carry to my car. I don't see anybody, but have an uneasy feeling that maybe somebody sees me.

Wagner's all sweetness and light when I set the wooden box on a marble-slab table in the laboratory. He figures it's a case of Scotch I'm bringing in.

"Ah!" he sighs, rubbing the side of his nose. "Good old Chris."

"It ain't Scotch," I tells him.

His eyes glare reproachfully. "I might have known. The age of miracles is passed." He takes a bottle from the box. "Hmmm. Picric acid. Where'd this come from?"

"Bottom of harbor," I explain. "Snagged it with grappling hooks."

Wagner shakes his head. "Picric acid. I don't get it. Is it evidence, Chris?"

"I wouldn't know," I shrug. "Evidence is something that can be linked with crime. And I haven't uncovered any links—only headaches." I leave Wagner and go to my office. Links is a good idea. I'd better start looking for some.

THERE'S a slender, mousy looking man sitting near my superior's desk when I get there. He looks me over in detail with his slate-gray eyes which don't please me none. But he don't say anything. That's fine. I don't say anything either since I got a report to make out.

It comes to me after a few minutes that there's a nasty quiet in the office. The mousy man isn't talking to McGrath. He

ain't talking to anybody. He's just sitting there.

"Something on your mind?" I ask.

He nods. "Several things, Detective Larsen." His voice has undertones I can't make out. McGrath is still busy saying nothing.

"A man's been murdered," I says. "It means work for me. And I'm not a mind reader."

"Sorry," says the man in a tone which don't sound sorry at all. "I have work to do, also. Important work. My name is Alvin Worth."

"Chris Larsen's mine. So what's the connection?"

"Crime. I've been sent here from headquarters of Naval Intelligence. Our lines of investigation on the Doheny warehouse death have crossed. We usually cooperate with local law enforcement agencies. Occasionally, when circumstances are unusual, we prefer to work alone. This is the *unusual* case."

Turning the case over to Naval Intelligence don't please me at all. If Worth had talked with me before I'd been smacked down in the alley, things would have been different. My head still aches where the gun butt lashed it, and it's hard to be anything but sarcastic. "What makes you think our police force shouldn't investigate what appears an ordinary homicide case?"

"I haven't come here to argue. Furthermore, I don't like your attitude. What have you done so far in your investigation?"

I'm sore by this time and I don't care whose toes I trample on. And truth has lost its meaning. "Nothing," I tell him.

His slate-gray eyes stare coldly at the point above my head. It's a trick that throws you off balance. It makes you want to turn around and see what the other guy's looking at. There's nothing mousy about him when he shoots the next question.

"Did you get a description of the man who attacked you in the alley on the teletype yet?"

It's some seconds before I pull out an answer to this one. It's like someone reached into your mind and lifted out some secret information that you had purposely concealed. My first reaction is to sock him, then apply a special technique which loosens tongues and makes the most silent men talk. I decide against it. Something tells me it wouldn't work against this man. I grin amiably. "The teletype? Oh, I get what you mean. Expect to send out the description this evening."

"Don't do it," he orders. "Understand? If we need help, a request will be forwarded to your office from Naval Intelligence Headquarters. This case concerns the theft of Naval supplies. Nothing more. Our organization prefers to handle it in its own way. No hard feelings I hope."

I'm still wearing my grin and it hurts like hell to hold the pose. "None at all. The department will be glad to cooperate, or not cooperate, whichever you want."

Alvin Worth nods and gets up. From the doorway he says to my superior: "Official confirmation from our headquarters may be delayed for several days. Rest assured, however, your office will be relieved of all responsibility."

Worth goes out.

IN HALF a minute I go to the door and look down the hall. It's empty. I jump to my desk and call Sergeant Allaway. "Allaway," I says quietly, "there's a man who came into my office— Oh, you know him. Swell. He just left the office. Put a tail on him. Best man you've got."

Captain McGrath's glaring at me when I drop the receiver in its cradle. "Can't you get it through your thick head, Chris, that this case is out of our hands?"

"My head may be thick, Captain, but I'm holding onto this homicide case with everything I've got. If you still think I'm behaving like a dumb Swede, call Langstrom."

McGrath don't lose any time. Langstrom of Naval Intelligence informs him that his organization had never heard of the case. Not only that, it wasn't even mildly interested. Solving the murder was a job for the police department.

When the captain replaces the receiver he's licking his lips like he's eaten something that don't taste so good. "And you let that man get away—"

"Take it easy, Captain. I couldn't do anything else at this stage. Now listen. I bring everything up to date about the trouble in the alley, the copper disk and the finding of the Picric Acid. And he might have got away with it," I point out, "if he hadn't made one little error. He asked me if I'd got a description of the man who attacked

me in the alley on the teletype yet. It's only natural that I should yelp to everybody in the department about the guy who slugged me. Only I didn't yelp. Get the point. No one knew about that attack. That is, no one but the guy who slugged me, or friends of his."

"Gee," growls McGrath. "That man had plenty of nerve."

I'm thinking the same thing, but all I say is, "It boils down to this simple fact. Nobody's been stealing Naval supplies. That's a stall to give our caller's organization time to cover up. There's more to this than a single killing. The man who was shot through the head and afterwards burned to prevent recognition had discovered something that we are not yet aware of."

"It still might be theft. Black Market operators will pay top prices for--"

"No," I cut in. "There's no private market for Picric Acid like there would be for gasoline. And this case is tied somehow to that case of acid I found near Gorski's houseboat."

McGrath nods. His eyes look mean. But he don't feel any meaner than I do. I light a cigarette and try to figure my next move. Nothing happens inside my head. My mind stays blank until the phone rings. The call is from O'Malley. I listen, then tell him to wait where he is.

Beacon Street's rowdy in spite of the dimout. I go down it a couple of blocks, turn right and head toward the waterfront until I come to Twin Anchors.

From across the street I look it over like I'd never seen it before. It ain't always been Twin Anchors. Before Pearl Harbor it had been a chop suey joint run by Mishi Kamayatsu, a fat nip who looked like a vegetable grower, and talked with a Harvard accent. I turn this odd fact over in my mind and don't ring any bell.

O'Malley's sore when he contacts me. "You can have my badge any time you want it, Chris."

"Keep it," I tell him. "What happened?"

"I tailed the man to the front entrance and my eyes never left the door even while I was in the phone booth across the street. I just checked to see what table he was sitting at. And he ain't there."

I should have known that this man with the slate-gray eyes would do something like this. "Don't feel bad," I tell O'Malley. "We're dealing with a man who's probably smarter than either of us. He must have walked straight through the dining room to the kitchen and out the back door. Well, he got away, and it's up to us to locate him again. This we'll do through his pal, Gorski. You remember Josef? He's living in a houseboat in the lower harbor next to the Miller drydock. Find Gorski and follow him wherever he goes. I'll assign another man to relieve you later on."

We separate and I go back to headquarters.

NOTHING happens for two days. Gorski can't be found anywhere in Pedro. I go down to the houseboat with O'Malley. The rowboat is no longer tied to the piling. I look at the Yale lock on the door. It's still there only it's been unlocked and locked again since I last saw it. The lock is in a reverse position from what it was when I looked at it last.

I send O'Malley to my car for a tire iron. We pry the hasp off the casing and push the door in. Gorski's waiting for us, one eye closed, the other one open. His mouth's twisted in a leer. He's wedged between a galley stove and a wood box. He don't say anything. How can he? Gorski's dead. His throat is cut from ear to ear.

"Gee!" gasps O'Malley.

I don't waste any time. "Call Captain McGrath," I tell O'Malley. While I'm waiting for the experts to arrive, I have a chance to look around. I can see that the place has been torn apart and searched thoroughly which indicates that Gorski might not have been rubbed out by his own waterfront pals. And this observation brings up the question. Who, then, went to the trouble of slitting Gorski's throat in so professional a manner. I'm stumped. The whole set-up is cock-eyed. It doesn't follow the usual waterfront pattern.

While I'm still tangled in useless speculation the experts arrive in force. Pictures, finger-printing and examination of the corpse take up the next two hours. When it's all over I'm just as smart as I was at the beginning. Maybe I know even less.

Gorski's dead. No doubt about that. But why was Gorski killed? I think back. Have I made any mistakes? The answer is yes. I

should have tailed the man who called himself Alvin Worth instead of delegating that job to someone else. I should have waited for Gorski to return to the houseboat that night, then placed him under arrest. I should have joined the Marines at the beginning and lied about my age. I forget about Gorski and think instead what a swell time I might be having in Japan.

In warfare you got somebody to hate and shoot at. No gumshoeing around. No asking a lot of questions and receiving the wrong answers from habitual liars. You scramble up some south Pacific beach and start shooting, and you keep it up until there's no more Japs to shoot. Maybe I get to muttering out loud about the glories of the Marines and the headaches of a waterfront detective. After all, who really cares about the unknown man who died in a lonely warehouse, or about the death of a harbor squatter name of Josef Gorski. Who cares whether——

I'm suddenly aware that Doc Healy has me by the arm. "Snap out of it, Chris," he says, quiet like.

"This is my misery," I protest. "If I want to wallow—"

"Listen," says the Doc, his wiry fingers biting into my arm. "Forget about the Marines. You're damn well too old and you know it. You're a detective, and you've got two murders on your hands. If the solution is out of hand, think back where the trail got cold and begin all over."

I think back like he tells me. And the answer is Twin Anchors where the man with the slate-gray eyes faded out of the case. "Thanks, Doc," I grin. "I think you got something in that head of yours besides medical textbooks."

Twin Anchors looks different in the daytime, a drab, squarish building with rust stains showing on the stucco finish where rains had washed down from rusted screens. I walk inside and have a sandwich and a beer. It's just like any other place. I go out when I finish my beer and walk around the block and look at the building from the side.

There's a big mound of loose dirt on a vacant lot adjoining which looks a little queer. Feeling I'm getting nowheres fast, I go back to headquarters where I talk to the city building Inspector. He tells me that the party leasing the property asked for and received a permit to construct an air-raid shelter beneath the building. But the air-raid shelter had never been constructed. Excavation had been started, then abandoned. I thank him and chew on this new fact. It tastes flat.

LATE in the evening I return to Twin Anchors. Something keeps pulling me towards the place. I cross the empty lot. The high pile of dirt shields me from the street. The restaurant's crowded. Through an open window I can hear a juke box. Some dame is singing "OH WHAT A BEAUTIFUL MORNING."

Suddenly I'm aware I'm not alone on the empty lot. There's a little man standing beside me holding the biggest gun I've ever seen. Maybe it looks big on account of the hand that holds it is small. Or because it's within three feet of my coat buttons.

"Please do not move, Mr. Rohl," says the little man.

I'm not Mr. Rohl, and I don't like to get hit with a .45 bullet. So I stand still. My body's tingling all over. Everything's all right again. I forget I want to be a Marine. There's a little Jap within three feet of me waiting to be taken apart. Gee, I feel swell.

"Either shoot or put the gun away," I warns the little guy.

He steps closer and peers at my face. "You're not Herman Rohl," he states. "It will afford me meagre satisfaction in sending you on to join your Aryan ancestors."

"I'm not Rohl," I tell him. "Make you feel any better?"

"Disappointment is a yoke around my neck. Who *are* you?"

"I'm Larsen from police headquarters."

"Oh;" he starts lowering the gun and backing away.

"Now don't run away, Mister Jap—"

The gun lifts in a swift arc. I brace myself against the expected impact of a bullet in my chest. Even in the dark I can feel the cold fury of this little guy's emotions.

"Please don't court death again, Larsen, by calling me a Jap. I'm Chinese."

I relax. "That's fine. Shall we start all over. Maybe you're a friend of the man found murdered in the Doheny warehouse. You're looking for trouble. You're going to get it."

"I expect it. Trouble is relative. Even death."

"What was your friend doing in the Doheny warehouse?"

"I have no friends. Only enemies."

The little guy's stubborn. I take the bronze key from my pocket and show it to him. "Does this object make sense?" I ask.

"You still may be a friend of Rohl. The key means no more to me than the picked carcass of yesterday's duck."

"Let's skip the duck. I'm talking about Rohl. If he's the man I think he is, I want him for murder. Now listen," I continue, "either you talk and explain a few things right now, or I take you to police headquarters and sweat it out of you."

"I'm a timid, fearful man, Larsen. Yet, for some unfathomable reason I do not react favorably to pressure methods. So why waste each other's time. My name is Lao Ming, special agent from Chungking. I have a mission—to destroy everything Japanese."

"You don't talk like a Chink."

"There are institutions of learning, my friend, both in America and in China. Destruction of Japanese, however, was taught to me by experts in Canton. Though a timid man, as I said before, I believe I have mastered an ancient art. Indeed, I might be called efficient."

Again I feel that tingling all over my body. "You did a sweet job of destroying Josef Gorski. He was not Japanese." I had the feeling that Ming was smiling even though I could not see his face clearly. Connecting him with Gorski's death was just a guess.

"That incident was unfortunate but necessary," he admits. "Gorski had knowledge of the harbor. Not being an alien he was useful to those aliens who needed his services. But he was stupid enough to point this big gun at me when he discovered me searching his filthy houseboat."

"Murder in this country means death, Ming."

"This fact is within my knowledge."

"Let's work together."

"He traveles swiftest who travels alone."

"In China, maybe. Now listen. I'm hired by a lot of people, Ming. I arrest men I believe guilty, bring in evidence, hand it over to the District Attorney. He prosecutes. The jury turns in its verdict, and the Judge passes sentence."

"No," says Ming, stubbornly. "I have lied to you. I do not know the man who died in the Doheny warehouse in spite of the bronze key which makes him a blood brother. Gorski committed suicide. These statements I can tell the District Attorney. And he will have to believe me for he will not be able to prove otherwise."

The longer I know this little Chink, the better I like him. I place both hands on his frail shoulders. "Listen, Ming," I admit, "maybe there's angles to this case I don't know about. Know what I found at Gorski's place before you arrived?"

"I listen with infinite patience."

"A case holding twelve quarts of Picric acid. And when I think of Picric acid I am reminded of TNT, or something that explodes or burns. It fits in with a theory I can only guess at. It concerns men on ships. My kind of men. The kind who work, drink and raise hell and aren't afraid of any race or combination of races in the world. They come from east and west, north and south. Most of them are decent and law-abiding. A few are heels. But, by God, Ming, they're Americans whether their ancestors were Swedes, Danes, Dagoes or Heinies. They're manning our ships—ships that are catching on fire at sea."

Ming puts fingers to his lips. So I lowers my voice. "And when I think how those guys suffer with their ships burning beneath them somewhere in the lonely reaches of the Pacific, I want to do a little destroying myself, Ming. I'm not speaking to you as a detective. I'm giving it to you privately, as a man with a chip on his shoulder. Listen, Ming, no one but me knows the nationality of your dead compatriot. His body was burned past recognition. I found the key,

however, and as long as I hold that key, I'm considering myself an honorary member of your good squad. Do we work together, or do I have to go after Rohl and his mob alone and shove you in the klink?"

"Circumstances force the lion and the leopard to hunt together," says Ming. "Reserve the klink for less worthy persons."

"Swell. My car is parked around the corner. Come on."

"The night has many hostile eyes," says Ming, craftily. "You go first and wait for me. I prefer the devious way for there are many who might mistake me for Japanese."

I walk through the vacant lot to the street, turn the corner and reach my car. I climb in and switch on the parking lights. Then I wait. Ming don't come. I wait some more. Still Ming don't show up. Maybe I should get sore. But I don't. I just get a little scared —not of physical violence, or the fact that I might get hurt. I'm scared of a mousy man with slate-gray eyes who calls himself Alvin Worth. I'm scared because he can think faster than me.

There's something about him that suggests the Gestapo. He's no waterfront mobster. He's the brain. And his is the type of brain that I'm scared of. Not for a single moment do I doubt Lao Ming meant to come to my car. He didn't come because someone prevented him. I start the motor and drive away.

WITHIN five minutes I'm back on the same street again only in a different spot. I get out and walk carefully down a garage drive between two buildings. A gate's ahead of me. It's not locked. I push through.

It's dark and I have to feel my way. Gradually I work towards that pile of dirt near Twin Anchors. By this time I'm on my hands and knees. The juke box is making a lot of noise. I reach the spot where I left Lao Ming.

Where the loose dirt covers the grass of the vacant lot there's a spot lighter than the rest. On it I see the big gun which I had last seen in Ming's little hand. Something clutches at my heart and squeezes it hard.

Then I make a mistake and stand up. I'm aware of it a split second after I see two jets of yellow flame stabbing through the dark. Lead slugs miss me by the thickness of a dime. My knees cave and I drop on my face.

A man comes out of the shadows near the back wall of Twin Anchors. The juke box is wailing "LAY THAT PISTOL DOWN, BABE." I hear the deep tone of a freighter's siren as the ship warps from its berth in the harbor. I hear also my own breathing which is harsh and jerky. My lip's bleeding, and there's a salty taste on my tongue.

I'm in no mood to argue with anybody. I roll on my side and squeeze the trigger of my Police Special. The bullet strikes the man a little above his belt buckle. Even the brassy resonance from the juke box couldn't quite smother the explosions. I stay where I am, not moving.

In a couple minutes a prowl car rolls down the street, slows almost to a stop, then moves on. The juke box's still playing loud. No one else comes from the back wall. I call myself a fool for playing this case alone.

Still I don't make any move. Neither does the man somewhere in front of me. A light wind blows in from the channel bringing with it a ground fog.

I get up and start walking. Six feet from the wall I stop. He's lying on the ground. I shine my flash on his face. It's the tough one who clubbed me in the alley. His pockets reveal that he's Herman Rohl, manager-owner of Twin Anchors. Nothing more. I search for his rod. He hasn't any. And there's no holster. The guy wasn't taking chances in case of a frisk by harbor guards or police.

My lip is still bleeding I wipe it on the back of my hand. The fog's swirling around me in clammy coils as I back away from my victim. Mechanically I thrust a fresh cartridge into the Police Special's cylinder. I'm trying to fit the little guy, Lao Ming, into the picture.

Somebody had to fire those two shots since Herman Rohl carried no weapon at the moment of his death. Was it Ming? And was the little guy a Jap after all. Yet if Ming was a Jap, why hadn't he plugged me when we first met? He had the chance. His big gun was close to my coat buttons.

I pick up Ming's hat. It's an ordinary hat of crush felt. Why I did it I don't know. My fingers turn back the leather sweatband. A folded square of tissue-thin paper drops to the ground. I pick it up and examine it behind the pile of dirt.

My flash reveals a miniature drawing. My hands tremble. I'm scared again and I'm not ashamed to admit it. The pile of dirt I'm crouching behind takes on a sinister meaning. The dirt comes from a tunnel leading from beneath Twin Anchors to the water's edge under a rotten, unused pier condemned by the Port Authority.

How and by what means had Lao Ming discovered the tunnel? What was it being used for? I don't know. I do know, however, that the little guy hadn't crossed me up. Somewhere beneath the building, or in the tunnel, he was being held prisoner. Maybe he was already dead. A faint hope that he was still alive makes me move fast.

CROSSING the vacant lot, I walk down the street till I find a phone booth where I call Headquarters. "Send a car to the empty lot next to Twin Anchors," I instruct Sergeant Allaway. "A dead man close to the wall at the back. His name is Herman Rohl. No sirens, Sergeant. Just put him on a stretcher and take him away as quietly as possible." I hang up.

The light is good in the booth so I take the drawing from my pocket and study it again. While I'm trying to pick out fine details, the booth door opens. A naval officer stands in the opening. Two and a half stripes on his sleeve indicates he's a Lieutenant Commander. This detail I notice before I see his face. Then I get a nasty shock. It's the man who called at Headquarters—the man with the slate-gray eyes who called himself Alvin Worth from Naval Intelligence.

"That's a clever sketch," he says. "Your Chinese friend is quite a draftsman."

Things like this don't happen. There is a limit to risks one man may take especially at a navy port like Pedro. I'm slow on the uptake. And I can't think of anything to say.

"You've got Ming's hat in your pocket," he points out. "And you probably imagine that Naval Intelligence doesn't know about this Chinaman's activities. And perhaps I did not make myself clear this afternoon, Larsen. You were warned to keep out of this investigation."

"I remember something of the sort," I grin. "I just met Ming, and we became pals. Sorry you don't need my help, but until our department receives orders direct from Naval Intelligence, I'll keep on with my investigation."

His lips twitch and I know he's thinking fast. "Perhaps I underestimated your abilities, Larsen."

"That's possible."

"Let's adjourn somewhere and have a drink."

Right now I'd like nothing better than a double Scotch. I need it. But the Scotch will have to wait.

"Can't be done," I tell him, virtuously. "Not while I'm on duty."

He nods. "Quite right." His eyes bore into mine. "Now that you know about the tunnel, what do you propose to do?"

"I haven't made up my mind."

"Has it occurred to you that this tunnel may be merely an air-raid shelter?"

"I thought of that."

"That's exactly what it is. I learned of its existence sometime ago. If you think there's anything unusual about it, suppose we examine it together."

I try to make my voice sound casual. Discovery of the tunnel and what it conceals makes me a distinct menace to this man's organization. He'll kill me or lead me into a trap. I don't like traps. Being killed is something that ain't happened to me yet. At least Ming wasn't afraid. He might have had the whole police force behind him, or the F. B. I. He hadn't asked for it. For a timid man, like he admitted he was, the little guy had plenty of courage.

Okay, I tells myself. You're a big guy, Chris. You've still got two good legs. There is nothing wrong with your fists. You're tough, you're mean and you're a fool. So what are you waiting for?

I put the drawing in my pocket. "The idea of us working together is okay by me. Let's start at the waterfront end of the tunnel and work back."

He nods. "Very well, Larsen."

We leave the booth and go to the waterfront. The pier at this spot is guarded even though it isn't in use. Worth speaks to the guard and his uniform is enough authority to pass us through a wire gate.

Beyond, looming black against the fog are long sheds of corrugated metal like giant coffins. The place reeks with the tang of salt and decay.

ACROSS the waters of the bay I can see two spots of light against the fog bank. One comes from Terminal Island shipyards. The second from the yards at Wilmington. Faintly through the night comes the whine and scream of winches lowering cargo into the holds of many ships. The throb of engines sounds close as a black freighter plows heavily toward the harbor's entrance toward the open sea.

We find cleats nailed to a piling down which we lower ourselves. The ground is still wet from an ebbing tide. I have my gun and flash out. I'm not taking chances. This is it. This is the time for the showdown.

Worth has both hands in his coat pockets. "Where do you think we'll find the tunnel entrance?" he asks.

"Straight ahead under the foundations of the warehouse buildings. It's got to be there."

My flash beam moves on ahead of us. We come to a wall above high tide marks. There we find interlocking steel pilings shoring the bank. There's no sign of an opening anywhere. I'm too concerned keeping slate-gray eyes under observation to really examine the wall.

We stand there in the dark.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes pass. I hear a faint splashing. It's a rhythmic sound like somebody swimming. "Listen," I whisper. "Hear anything?"

Worth is shifting his position. "No," he says.

"Listen again," I warns him. Maybe fifty feet behind us is the water which I can hear slapping against the pilings. Mingling with this is another sound, persistent yet audible. It comes nearer. It stops.

It's pitch dark beneath the pier. So when they scramble from the water I can't see them at all when they come our way. They pass within a few feet of us, their bare feet pattering on the damp ground.

One of them must have had a flashlight concealed beneath the pier for it blinked on and threw a round circle of light on the steel pilings. A hand presses against the metal, and three sections of it sink noiselessly into the ground. Beyond was a rectangular opening about three feet high. This much only I see before their flash winks out. When I reach the point where I had seen the opening, the pilings were again as I had first seen them.

"Ingenious," says Worth. "I believe we have uncovered the method the thieves used in entering and leaving our warehouses. It's time we entered the tunnel."

The gag is worn out. Naval supplies aren't being taken from warehouses along the waterfront. Something else is happening that I don't yet know. The answer lies somewhere inside the black tunnel.

I know Worth's looking my direction now and his thoughts are on one thing only —my destruction before I discover the secret the tunnel holds. Pleasant guy to have for a companion. Counting the three men who just passed into the tunnel, I'm up against four. Not so good. There's still time to say no about going with him into the tunnel from which there'd be no turning back. Hell! I'm no hero. I'm just a plain dick with a body as sensitive to pain as any other man's body.

Funny how the little guy, Ming, keeps cropping up in my mind. When I figure the going is tough, there he is. During that second Worth is waiting for my decision, Ming's voice is purring in my ears. "I'm a timid, fearful man, Larsen—I have a mission —to destroy everything Japanese—I believe I might be called—efficient."

And somewhere at the far end of this black tunnel is Lao Ming. Dead or alive I'll never know until I've made the journey through it to its terminous beneath Twin Anchors.

I flash my light on the steel pilings. "See if you can work the combination," I tell Worth.

He pushes forward and down. It's too easy. The pilings sink downward. A black opening yawns. "Want to go first?" he asks.

"Thanks for the compliment. I'll tag behind. These men have been stealing *your* naval supplies. I hope you've got a gun."

"I have," he informs me. He crawls through the opening.

I let him get a couple minutes start before I look at the luminous hands of my watch. It's eleven thirty. At midnight a Coast Guard boat will be moving up the harbor on regular patrol. I snap on my flash and point the beam toward the water. By this time Worth is so far into the tunnel I can't even hear him.

The tunnel's ceiling slopes upward once I'm inside and I can walk nearly upright. I've gone perhaps two hundred feet when the first warning comes. It ain't anything I can see or hear, merely what I can smell.

It's the odor of a greasy, human body. My hands had been touching both sides of the tunnel. Now, only one hand is in contact with earth. The other has slipped over an edge which means either the beginning of a lateral cut in the main excavation, or a niche where a killer can crouch.

And this is as far as my thoughts go. Only the fact that I come to a complete stop when my fingers slide over the end of the wall saves me from the knife blade. I hear it tear through the front of my coat an instant before a sweating body crashes against me.

I lunge into the darkness and my fingers slide off a naked arm. I hear a metallic tinkle as the dropped knife strikes the ground under my feet. Then the greasy, naked body crashes against me, both arms circling my back. I know what's coming. Instead of trying to twist out of the hold I walk right into it and throw my assailant off balance. I reach out with both hands. One finds the head, bald, shaven. That tells me where the neck is. I twist sideways and get it in the crook of my arm.

By this time my back is beginning to hurt. I put on pressure just as he lets go and leaps sidewise. The muffled crack which follows is barely audible. But I know what has happened. I lower the body to the ground. Legs and arms twitch. Bare heels beat a tattoo against the tunnel floor. Then the man who would have knifed me is still. He's dead, his neck broken.

I feel around until I find the knife. Raising my pant leg, I tuck it beneath my sock garter. I'm hurrying now as I move along the tunnel feeling for other openings. All the time I'm trying to figure Worth's play. He's far ahead of me. Maybe he'll have time to lay another trap when he discovers the first one went wrong.

I move faster, stumbling over clods of dirt. Miles ahead of me I see a slit of light though maybe it's less than two hundred feet.

By the time I reach it I'm breathing hard. It's a canvas curtain which covers a large underground room. The light is blinding for a moment. It's a second or two before my eyes adjust themselves to the change.

First thing I see is a long table, tiers of bunks, shelves covered with canned goods, bottles of chemicals and what looks like a small electric furnace. There's a plank floor covered with linoleum. And in a pink, overstuffed chair, behind a big packing case, sits a fat Jap—Mishi Kamayatsu, the polite nip who looks like a vegetable grower and talks with a Harvard accent.

ON THE floor, his back to the packing case, is my little Chink pal, Lao Ming. His head is sunk over his chest. His face and the front of his shirt are blood-smeared. The little guy's been taking a beating. He ain't dead, however, or even unconscious. One eye is open and it's regarding me sadly. All this I'm aware of almost before the curtain drops in place behind me, and Kamayatsu's high voice is rasping politely against my ears.

"Ah! The San Pedro police. I was expecting you, Larsen. So sorry you found the passage dark though I instructed one of my men to guide you."

"Must be some other guy. The one I met was distinctly hostile and tried to teach me the fine points of hara-kiri. I broke his neck. How are you, Mishi." I try to grin. But it doesn't jell. The grin turns into a sour smirk.

The fat Jap's nodding like he was sleepy. "So sorry, Larsen, that my man misunderstood his orders."

"Mistakes happen, Mishi." I look around some more. "Nice layout you've got here."

"It's adequate for my purpose. Far more so than one of your re-location camps."

"How come they missed you in the round-up?" I'm stalling for time as I continue to look around. Worth's not in sight. But there is an opening in the wall between two tiers of bunks covered with the same kind of canvas as the covering over the tunnel opening. I start figuring. Those three swimmers must have been Japs. One is dead. That leaves two. Mishi Kamayatsu and Worth make four. I lick my lips and give a quick glance toward my little pal on the floor. Ming's head is level with my knees as I step close to the packing case.

"A fisherman who resembled me took my place," Mishi is explaining. "So sorry for him."

"The hell you are." I press my leg against Lao Ming's arm. The packing case prevents the Jap from seeing what I'm doing. I feel a touch light as fly wings and the knife is no longer lying flat along my leg.

Slowly I back away. Ming is still in the same position. So far as I can see he hasn't moved his arms. But there is no sign of the knife. There is no movement that I can detect behind either of the curtains. I'm still licking my lips and waiting.

"You're clever, Mishi." I want him to talk.

His eyes are opaque. There's no expression on his round, fat face. "Oh, yes. I am very, very clever. All Japanese are clever people. British are stupid. Chinese are less so. But Americans are not only stupid. They are inept, careless and to be quite frank, Larsen, fools."

"Careless, maybe. In too much of a hurry all the time, Mishi. But not fools. You couldn't mean that."

Kamayatsu's expression remains fixed. "Men of your type interest me, Larsen. You learned of this tunnel. And you decided to investigate with the help of Herr Kurt Berchtold. Your carelessness in coming alone with only Berchtold as an aide is going to cost you your life."

"Funny," I says. "He wore a navy uniform. And he told me his name was Alvin Worth. He must have lied to me."

"Indeed!" Mishi's eyebrows arch upward.

"Let's not kid ourselves," I snap. "So what's the answer?"

"I thought I made it clear. Physical extinction."

"Phooey, Mishi. One of Berchtold's punks tried it. Right now he's on a morgue slab. And one of your little brown goons tried the same stunt—"

The curtain across the tunnel swishes angrily. Herr Kurt Berchtold steps into the room. He's still wearing the naval officer's uniform, and holding a long-barreled Luger which he points at my chest. There's something different about him now. The mousy look which first placed him as a type is gone. His face has become hard, brutal, like the face of a fanatic storm trooper.

"*Genug!* Meddling copper!" His voice rises to such a high pitch it sounds like a woman's. He's looking at some spot above my head which worries me. Then he steps in close and hits my cheek with the Luger barrel. My head jerks under the impact. I don't move. He hits me again. Pain knifes through my body.

I sag. My head rolls forward. My knees bump the plank floor. I'm bent almost double. And while I'm in this position my coat swings away from the harness beneath my armpit. I reach for my gun as my right shoulder hits the floor. The Police Special spews out flame and metal. A little black hole appears under Berchtold's chin. Spasms rack his body. He slithers to the planks beside me. Then my head rocks like it was hit with a pipe wrench.

The room with its tiers of bunks starts revolving. I hear staccato Japanese syllables that bear no trace of Harvard accent. The huge fist of Mishi Kamayatsu hits me again. Before I can swing my gun around he grabs my ankle and heaves me against the wall.

My gun arm goes numb. While I'm shifting the weapon to my left hand I see two, three, then I lose track of the stocky little brown men milling through the opening between the bunk posts.

I'm beginning to sweat. This private brawl is developing into a small edition of the world war. Destroy the Germans, then go to work on the Japs. I've got five bullets left, and it's going to take at least two slugs to penetrate the fat covering Mishi Kamayatsu's black heart. But I'm forgetting my little Chinese pal.

Lao Ming is on his feet and slithering across the planks like a venomous cobra. There is a grin of utter ecstasy on his bruised face. I see the knife flash once, then my attention jerks back to Kamayatsu, the kingpin Jap. He has a gun in his hand. I know what that means.

My first bullet smashes against his shoulder and spins him around. His huge body crashes against a shelf holding what looks like tubes of lead pipe. They start rolling and dropping to the floor. My next bullet misses him by a foot. I see one of the lead tubes jump under the impact of the bullet.

Then I'm nearly blinded by the blue-white flames that hiss from both ends of the lead tube. The flames melt other lead tubes. Though I'm on the floor, my skin shrivels from the scorching blasts.

Kamayatsu is closer to the flames than I am. He tries to get away. The jets of

flame move faster than he does. In that strained, terrific moment I understand what happened to that poor Chink in the Doheny warehouse.

I start to crawl toward the canvas covering the opening to the tunnel. The shelf where the lead tubes had rested collapses spilling the remainder that hadn't melted on the floor. One of them strikes my ankle. I grab it and put it in my pocket.

Lao Ming is beside me. I twist around and look for the Japs. They lie in a huddled heap, everyone with a slit throat. I gag. The little guy is whispering in my ear as we crawl toward the tunnel opening. "Destruction of Japanese . . . taught by experts in . . . ancient art . . . excellent blade . . . believe I might be called . . . efficient." Then he collapses.

I drag him through the curtain into the tunnel. I crawl back and get Berchtold. The canvas curtain flames and shrivels to ash. Heat swirls into the tunnel. I can feel it against the soles of my shoes as I haul a dead man and a live one away from the crackling inferno behind me.

About a hundred feet from where I started I get violently sick. The dirt floor is cool when I lay my cheek against it. My jaw throbs with pain where Berchtold had clubbed it. I lie still and wait for the nausea to pass.

I hear voices. The tunnel becomes choked with men in dungarees. I know then that my flashlight beam from the tunnel opening was being investigated by the alert Coast Guard.

"Lieutenant Detective Larsen from Police Headquarters," I tells the petty officer in charge of the detail. "The man in the uniform is quite dead. The other man, a Chinese, is alive. Handle him gently, you lads. He's the bravest, toughest little chunk of a yellow man I ever worked with. And he's my friend."

In the Coast Guard launch the night fog caresses my face and I feel good. I need to for there is work ahead that must be done swiftly and thoroughly.

AT THREE o'clock I'm back in my office. Lao Ming is with me. He's sitting quiet like and at peace with the world. The matron from the women's jail on the top floor has sent him down about a gallon of tea which the little guy is happily drinking.

There's others in the office with me. Captain McGrath, Commissioner Horall and Langstrom from Naval Intelligence. It's Langstrom who's talking.

"That man you brought out of the tunnel, Larsen, is Kurt Berchtold all right. He was an attache of the German Consulate on the West Coast before the war. He was also a chemist. According to our reports he went to Argentina."

"Someone slipped up on Berchtold," I tell him. "They also were fooled by Mishi Kamayatsu. But that's understandable in the quick round-up of Japs following Pearl Harbor. Another man who looked like him went to an internment camp in his place. Mishi boasted of this himself to me. The rest of the Japs were evidently in this country unregistered. All were good swimmers."

Lanstrom scratches his chin. "It's too bad that Twin Anchors burned so swiftly and completely. We've lost a lot of evidence."

"And about six or seven Japs," I point out, "including the most important—Mishi Kamayatsu."

I take the lead tube out of my pocket and place it on my desk. "You won't need any more evidence than this. Fact is, Langstrom, you won't need any evidence at all. Nobody can be charged with crime or sabotage, because nobody, apparently, is alive. Take a good look at this tube. I had evidence of its existence before I knew what it was, or how it was used. I also took several beatings and made a lot of mistakes."

I rub my sore jaw. "Take it to an ordnance expert and he'll tell you the same thing as I'm going to. Jap swimmers carried them out at night when ships were being loaded. They were like rats the way they could climb hawsers to open ports that couldn't be watched all the time. They had plenty of patience and guts. They tossed them into loose cargo, into tankers, into lifeboats and rafts. And the tubes, being small, slid easily out of sight.

"But being out of sight didn't destroy their lethal power. Franz von Papen and his mob of arson experts thought up the deal during the first World War. They worked it for all it was worth while our country, neutral at the time, was sending war material to England and Russia."

I take the copper disk and the melted chunk of lead from my desk drawer and point to Ming. "I'm ignorant of some things. But Lao Ming is an intelligent Chinese, and a damned good man when the fighting gets tough. He believes in working alone same as me, so we get on fine together. Ming tells me how these bombs work and it clears up something that's been festering in my mind for months—ships catching on fire at sea."

Langstrom nods. Nobody breaks in. So I keep on talking. "Those fires that kept destroying Liberty ships carrying supplies to the Navy and Army in the South Pacific were caused by delayed-action fire bombs. A lead tube, six or seven inches in length, is sawed in two. A round, copper disk is then soldered to both cut ends dividing the tube into two compartments.

"One section of the container is then filled with Picric acid of which I found a whole case, but didn't know what part it played in the investigation. The other end was filled with a different chemical. Ming thinks it was Sulphuric acid. A chemist can check from a sample bomb I collected. After filling each compartment separately, plugs are inserted into open ends. Thickness of the copper disk regulates the time necessary for the acids to eat through the copper and come in contact with each other.

"But the instant they do come in contact you've really got something. The plugs blow from the ends of the tube and a white hot flame pours out in two directions. In the confined cargo space in a ship's hold, where everything is jammed in solid, it's just about impossible to get at the source of the conflagration because there are too many sources. In a couple of hours a ship is doomed and has to be abandoned."

Langstrom draws in a deep breath. "Larsen," he says, "there's a nice job waiting for you in Naval Intelligence—"

"You're too late," breaks in Commissioner Horall. "Chris wants to tote a Garand and snipe Japs with the combat Marines. He's too old, but he doesn't know it. So they'll probably assign him to Quartermaster duties at Pendleton, or the Marine Base at El Torro. That's the deal."

I look at the Commissioner's face and I realize there's truth in what he says even though I don't like his conclusion. Funny how things that seem important suddenly don't mean anything any more. Maybe my grin is slightly twisted on account of my sore jaw.

"If that's the deal, Commissioner, you can call it off. Passing out shoes and breeches to Boots at a Marine Base don't call for my kind of talent. I'm staying where I am—an ordinary city detective. I figure there's lots to be done in this port city. Unofficially, this efficient little Chinese, Lao Ming, is going to stay with me. Together we're going to watch the waterfront like it's never been watched before. And, Commissioner, as a special favor, I'm requesting a Special Deputy badge for my little Oriental friend. He deserves it and more."

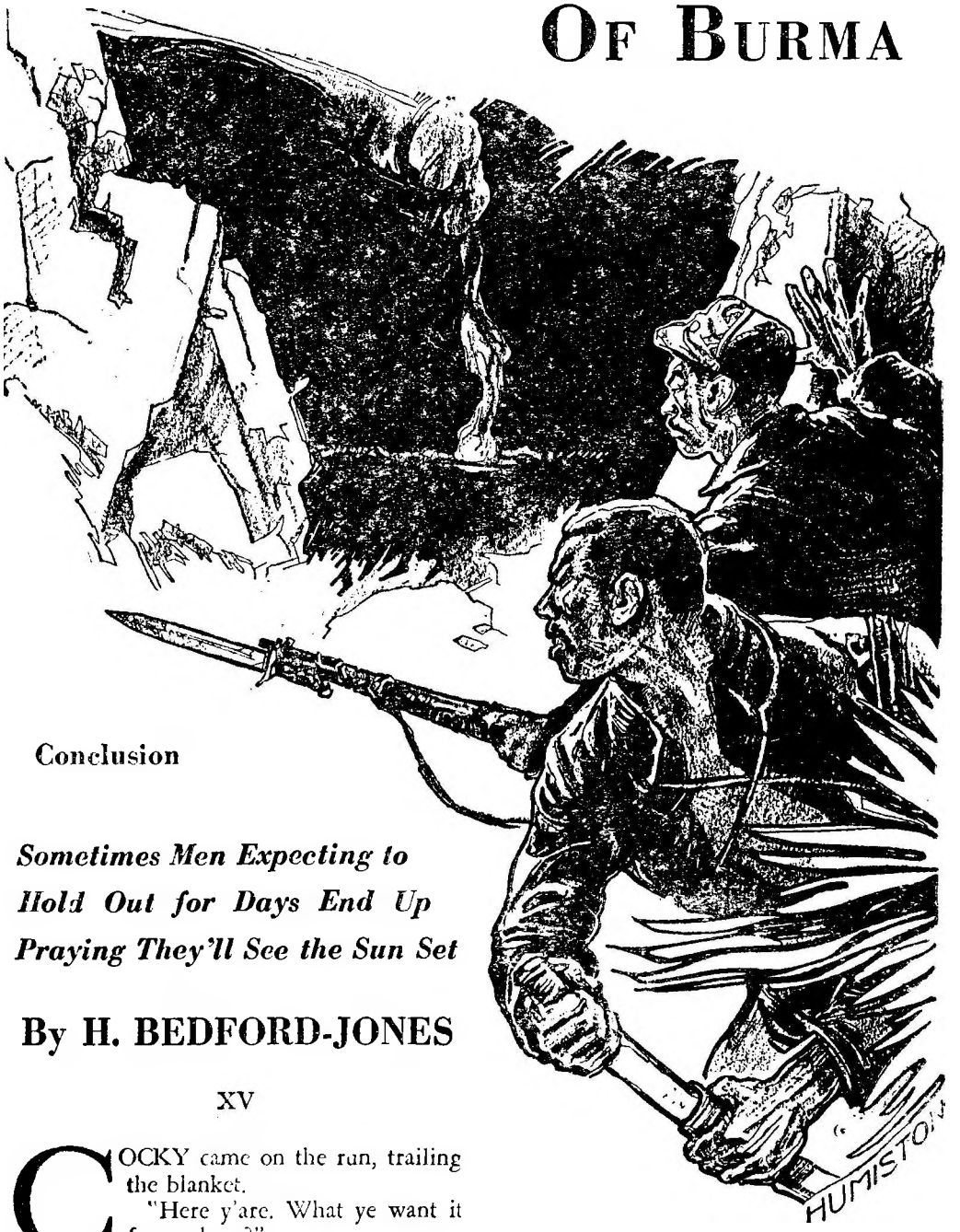
Commissioner Horall don't say anything for a moment. But I can see he's figuring angles. His eyes swerve to those of the Naval Intelligence chief. Langstrom nods.

"Lao Ming will receive the honorary badge from the Police Department," he says, quietly.

"Also a special one from the Navy," adds Langstrom.

The little guy digs up a smile from somewhere and uses it impartially on all of us. "Idea has merit," he beams.

THE THOUSAND DEATHS OF BURMA



Conclusion

Sometimes Men Expecting to Hold Out for Days End Up Praying They'll See the Sun Set

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

XV

COCKY came on the run, trailing the blanket.

"Here y'are. What ye want it for anyhow?"

Burton hurled himself at the matted grasses that covered the tires. Cocky joined him at the task. There were the tires, one atop the other, and the can of petrol. Burton seized on this, and began to unscrew the lid.

The drone of far planes came more loudly. Cocky stared up.

"Can't see 'em—hey, Burton! Look! There's one up high, to the east!"

Burton looked. His hands shook. He spilled the contents of the can on the rubber of the tires and on the sand below. A fighter, a Lightning, one of his own group, slanting down toward the crater, still far and barely visible against the eastern sky!

"Stand by with the blanket," he cried, fumbling for matches. "Rubber burns like nobody's business, thick black smoke—they can't help seeing it—"

The match trailed and fell. Flame shot up, curling about the rubber. The seconds ticked off like hours. A thick oily smoke began to rise—the rubber had ignited. Suddenly the fire got a grip. The rubber started to melt. It spluttered and swept up in a thicker smoke. The flames took hold fiercely, furiously, and lurid fire-shot smoke rolled up and up in a small column.

Wild exultation seized on Burton. That column of smoke would be seen, must be seen! He caught hold of the blanket. The Lightning was swooping down over the crater and valley. Cocky had the idea already, and listened to Burton's quick instructions with complete understanding.

"A puff for the dots, a longer one for the dashes—at it, now! Dash-dot-dash-dot for C—"

They essayed it. The first attempt was bungled; they had to stand close to the fiercely searing heat. Smoke curled around the blanket edges—then they got it. For a moment the smoke was repressed and gathered. It went up again in a quick puff as they drew the blanket aside. Again—a longer puff this time, and the C was under way.

Burton called the turns, literally. He dared not look away from the job now, but above the sizzle of the bubbling rubber could hear the loud increasing roar of engines.

"My God, it's hot as hell!" gasped out Cocky. He was coughing from the evil smoke, but did not loose the blanket. A tongue of flame licked out at him. With a cry, he staggered back. The blanket was snatched from his hands. Josie Crawford had come running to join them, in time to replace him. But now the two huge tires were both ablaze furiously.

C-A-I-R-O . . . the code word was spelled out. With a coughing gasp, Burton let go and went rolling in the sand—his clothes were smoking and afire, smoke had blinded him, the intolerable heat had shriveled and seared him. But the engine-roar was thundering in his ears; the plane had come down low, low, was circling!

He gasped air into his lungs and lay quiet. Soft, deft hands were working at him, stripping him to the waist, baring his knees and legs. Oil was spread over his skin, and the touch was a blessed relief. His eyes were watering and he could see nothing, but the babble of tongues above him told that the four Malay women were at work on him and on Cocky.

"The plane—the plane!" he broke out. "Did it see?"

"Yes, indeed!" answered Josie's voice, athrill with excitement. "It waggled its wings . . . now it's circling out over the lake and heading back. Lie quiet, chum! I don't think you're really burned, but they're going to put on bandages anyhow."

"All right, Cocky?" he called.

"Might be worse, partner," came the cheery response, drowned by the approaching roar of engines—a roar and a swooping rush of thunder.

A sudden jabbering of voices, then, as the thunder lessened and died away, the voice of Josie reached him.

"They dropped something—Saunders! Lady Bess! Get it!" After a minute she added: "They're getting it. Something white. Yank! What news from the hunting strip?"

"The Nips are coming in," said Burton. He sat up and knuckled his streaming eyes. Deft hands helped to loosely replace his garments. "Where's the Rajah?"

"Right here, old chap," replied the Rajah himself. "Damned little use to anyone with this bad arm. Hello! Here they come with the message. Looks like a handkerchief."

Burton could see a little now. Someone brought water and dabbed at his eyes. He wiped them and looked around. Saunders was lumbering up, holding the handkerchief he had retrieved. Just a handkerchief tied to a pistol and dropped in haste; scrawled on the linen were the two letters "O K".

"Thank God!" said Burton. "Josie, that was damned fine work! You saved the day.

When that spurt of fire shot out at Cocky I thought it was all off."

"So did I," added Cocky. "Josie, I'll give you a kiss for being a good girl when I get around to it!"

"I'll give you one here and now for being a bad boy," returned Josie, laughing almost hysterically. She suited action to words, then Cocky cried out sharply.

"Burton! Did you say the Nips are coming?"

"They sure are. That's the last report from Hunter. Well, we'd better get moving. Cocky, you and Saunders get back to join the Padre. He sent me to guide the girls to the cave. Tell the Padre we'll manage to bridge the chasm there, somehow."

He stood up and gathered himself together. Perhaps the oil had helped, but he was in no pain; there might be no actual burns or blisters, even. Cocky was striding away with Saunders, little the worse apparently.

Burton's gaze went to the sky. It was empty. The resounding engines were silent. The P-38 had disappeared as though it had never existed—but here were the handkerchief and the pistol to show it had been. None the less, that blank and empty sky, the complete disappearance of all touch with outside life, banished exultation. There flooded back upon them all a sense of despondency. The only reality was that the Japs were coming.

"What good will it do, even if they sent us help?" asked Josie, as the burdens were taken up and they all filed away on the unmarked trail to the gorge. "We'll be stuck away in a cave. We won't be out in the open, back yonder, where they'd look for us."

"I know," admitted Burton. "But at least they'll be aware that I'm alive. They saw other whites here."

"If they could fly back in ten minutes it might do some good," she argued. "But they won't come until tomorrow, if then. Perhaps not for days."

"Right. It's a tough world, Bright Eyes! All we can do is hope for the best and put up a hot fight."

IN HIS heart he agreed with her. There was no decent landing place except on the water itself. And the Fourteenth Air Force, now divided into a number of squadrons, had amphibians in its rapidly growing outfit. But what good would that do, with the Nips holding all the valley? Any rescuing planes would discover that unpleasant fact too late. In the attempt to bring help, they themselves might be destroyed.

Burton swore softly under his breath, in blank dismay, as he saw the possibilities. But nothing could be done about it now. Time was . . . time had been.

That two-mile tramp was no joyful promenade, but at the end of it came work that banished all else from mind. They gained the cavern, only to find that no one had a flashlight; such things did not grow on every bush in Peace Valley. Inside the cave entrance were the roughly trimmed trees fetched here by the Padre. They had to be carried along to the break, laid across it and bound together to form a desperately crude bridge. Burton was good for little—if not blistered, he was intolerably sore from head to foot. The Rajah was quite helpless to do any work. Lady Bess stared at nothing and talked to herself, poor soul.

Here, then, Josie took charge with brisk efficiency. The four brown women scattered and brought in brush and bits of dead bamboo. Makeshift torches were put together; these gave light sufficient for the purpose and the timbers were carried on to the abrupt chasm. Here they were lashed together by the light of the flickering flames.

The result was a horrible mess—uneven, knotty, little wider than a twelve-inch plank. Across this they must pass in uncertain light. Across it had to be carried all the supplies and blankets stacked at the cavern entrance. For, as Burton knew only too clearly, it was imperative that they get on to the big chamber of the petrified trees. Even to get this improvised bridge across the chasm was a task that looked superhuman.

"I'd jump that gap rather than try to cross on this fool thing," declared Josie. "And we can toss all the stuff across. How'll we get this jackass bridge in place?"

"I'll go across with a line tied to the end. You folks shove from here and I'll ease it up on the other side with the line," Burton replied. "It's no trick."

But it was. He dreaded that jump with all his soul, especially now, with his sore and tender skin. Still, he had done it once and could do it again—and did.

The bridge came across, slowly but surely. More brush was added to the flames; the ruddy leaping light flickered along the rock and into the gulf. Josie made good her boast and cleared the gap at one floundering leap. A rope was rigged from either end of the bridge as a hand-grip in case of disaster. The Rajah came across, laughing, while his wives chattered and giggled.

They followed, one holding the brown unperturbed baby. The thing could be negotiated safely, at least. Lady Bess came across. Nearly at safety, she lost her head, wavered, screamed and flung out her arms. Josie, standing ready, caught her hand and pulled her in; she fell in a limp sobbing heap.

"And nobody thought to bring a light. Damn!" said Burton. "Rajah, you go ahead. Keep to the right-hand wall and it'll guide you to the big chamber. You'll find daylight there. Josie, you stop behind, will you? I'll sling over some stuff while we have light."

HE WENT at the bridge and across, angrily cursing the unsafe foothold. Then he fell to work, while on the opposite side Josie arranged the stuff he sent over.

"Wait. The Malays don't like that bridge," she informed him.

"Don't like it myself. What's their kick?"

"Look at the end over there. It rests on a sort of big lip. It might give way."

This was true. He had not noticed the deep overhang before now, thrown into the shadow as it was. Still, it looked thick and solid. He shrugged.

"We can chance that. Looks thick enough to hold tons. This is the narrowest place, so leave things as they are. I think they'll do."

Ropes and bucket, blankets, supplies—everything that could be thrown in safety was got across. There was a stack at the cave entrance to follow, but that could wait. Then, with the blaze flickering out, he stepped on the rude bridge and went across fast—it sloped down a bit going this way. Loaded with blankets and food, he and Josie struck on into the dimness of the passage.

The four brown women and Lady Bess were busily at work getting things settled, when they reached the large chamber; the Rajah was sitting smoking in the sunlit opening above the gorge. Burton was astonished to find the sun in the west—the afternoon was half gone.

"I'll get back and find out what's happened, if anything," he said "Josie, you and the other gals can get some water in the bucket, scrub the floors, and mind you wash the windows well. Steak and onions for supper, please—well done, too—"

"No. Sit down. Stretch out," ordered Josie. "They tell me more oil must go on your burns. It will keep the skin from cracking and you'll feel fit tomorrow."

Despite protests, Burton was forced to submit. It was another half-hour before he could scramble down among the rocks from the opening, and set out for the camp. With all the party crowded into that cave, he reflected, life was going to be tough—but there would not be much of it.

All the way to the cliffs, he met no one. If his gaze wandered to the skies, it was not with hope; by the time any help could arrive, it would be useless. More than likely, he thought with a bitter laugh, a plane would come to drop messages and food—ha! A lot of good that would do.

Under the cliffs, he was astonished to discover what had been done, but his first concern was for news and food; he had not eaten since leaving Tom Hunter. Camped in the cave of the stone gods he found Lejeune, Rawlins and Thorne. All the others had gone with the Padre up the trail to keep in closer touch with Tom Hunter.

"One of the Malays brought in word about an hour ago," said Lejeune, after providing Burton with some food. "The Nips are heading in, all right, a big force with full equipment. Hunter says they went full tilt into one of our traps in the road and he showered 'em with grenades when they were in the hole. Hasn't lost a man and doesn't intend to; he says the Nips have lost heavily and were temporarily halted to scout."

Burton, cramming down food, looked at the three faces; they were tense, anxious, gloomy. He looked at the readied position, and nodded. The machine guns were placed in crannies of the rocks, slit trenches were dug in the sand. And, from the side of the camp, all was out of sight. Lejeune caught his eye and smiled.

"It's well designed," he said complacently. "Those guns cover the entire space

from the camp here—it's all open, this side the trees. They won't dream we have guns. Have you posted the two at the cave?"

"No," said Burton. "Job enough just getting settled in the blasted cavern," and he went on to tell of their troubles. The other two men came close, listening. Thorne pulled out a flashlight.

"Look," he said. "Suppose the three of us go back now to the cave and pitch in to lend a hand? We can leave this light with 'em. The Padre had another if needed here."

"Good idea!" chimed in Rawlins, as Lejeune nodded. "We can help 'em smooth things down. Where d'ye want the guns placed there, Burton?"

Burton's hard eyes softened as he looked at them.

So different now, these men! All likes and dislikes, all lusts and ambitions forgotten in the common peril.

"Good boys," said he. "Put one machine gun outside the cave to command the gorge, the other one inside. Plenty of ammo by each. And a case of grenades in the big chamber at the end."

"Right," said Lejeune. "We hear you signaled the plane. Think it'll do any good?"

"I doubt it," Burton replied frankly, and told why. "Don't count on anything from that source. They can't fly an army in here, and only an army would help us.

"Tell the Padre where we are, and why," said Lejeune. "Could your smoke signal have worked two ways—could Jap planes have spotted it?"

"Possibly," Burton admitted. "Though I didn't see any Japs. Too busy."

THE three men, loading up with the supplies stacked in the shallow cave of the stone gods, moved away. Burton went on toward the camp and the out trail. Looking back, he could see no indication of the machine guns among the rocks at the foot of the cliffs. The automatic rifles would do deadly work here, the machine guns would do worse.

Passing through the evacuated camp, he headed out along the trail. The stillness of the late afternoon was unreal. It was difficult to imagine that somewhere on ahead men were fighting and rifles spurting; all sounds were blanketed by distance and jungle. Death and battle were approaching upon wings of silence, but the slow approach was grimly certain.

A mile or so from camp, he sighted the group returning—the Padre and Cocky Bolt, Livermore, Saunders, and, to Burton's surprise and delight, Tom Hunter, unutterably weary, clothes torn to shreds by thorns, but alive. As they met, Hunter mutely extended his rifle, and Burton took it; the weapon was still warm to the touch.

"Thanks," said Hunter. "I'm about done in."

"What news?" asked Burton, as they all came to a halt.

"Nothing to beat any drums about," Hunter replied grimly. "There's around three hundred or more Nips, near as we could figure. They got everything—machine guns, a couple of light guns, and flamethrowers. My lord, the way those blasted spurts of fire sweep the ground! But they started fires in the brush and that helped hold up the bastards."

He ended with a weary sigh. The Padre took up the word.

"The Malays are sticking it out till morning, Burton. The Japs have been slowed down and won't get here before then."

We did spray 'em with hell for a while," Hunter added zestfully. "When they hit that first pit in the trail we were close enough to lob in grenades and get away before they could get the machine guns going. I bet we got fifty at one crack. But after that it was all leg-work and sniping, shooting up the advance scouts and so on. Didn't lose a man, either! But the more we kill, the more come on. Lord, I'm famished! A dip in the lake will be fine."

They made for the camp, Burton putting the Padre up to date on the situation in the gorge, and at the old mess-hut set about getting a meal ready. The sun was almost at the horizon. Hunter got his dip in the lake and came back refreshed and clear-eyed.

They discussed the coming morrow. The Padre had changed, too; he had become hard and alert and compact in word and thought. Nothing was "terrible" any more. He was facing facts with his eyes open and unshrinking.

"We must keep watch and watch tonight, of course," he said crisply. "The Malays will be in before dawn; we must arrange to give them some food and rest. Three of

us with automatic rifles—Burton, Hunter and I—will stop here among the huts to engage the scouts and hold them off a bit. Everyone else will be under the cliffs among the rocks."

"Huh!" grunted Hunter. "Right clear among these trees and back a ways. It'll be good shooting. How long do we stay here?"

"Long enough to make the Japs think we're here in some force and check them. Then we'll retreat to the cliffs, and the men there can cover us."

"Don't make it too long, then. If you wait till the Nips bring up a machine gun, which won't be long, covering us won't do any good."

The Padre nodded. "Three men to a machine gun—that will leave three others and the Malays to handle rifles. Of course, at first we'll all use the rifles. We won't open up the machine guns until the Nips are charging to get us."

"Look out for some shells first. Those mortars are bloody hell, too," said Hunter.

Cocky Bolt joined Burton; he was sore enough, but beyond a few blisters was not badly burned. They sat talking until the darkness stole down and with tropic swiftness changed into star-glow, and the new moon hanging in the west. It went down beneath the peaks while they talked. Cocky chuckled.

"Makes me laugh to think of that handkerchief with okay on it, and a wing-waggle to encourage us!" he observed. "A lot o' good it did us to signal that plane. Should have done it long ago."

"Can't tell what may come of it," Burton rejoined, and turned as the Padre called him. "Yes?"

"You and Hunter get to sleep. I'll take the first watch. The others, go on to the cliffs and tell Lejeune to have guards there also."

Burton crept to his pallet for the last time and was asleep before he knew it.

He wakened to find the Padre shaking him.

"Midnight. Here's the Malay, Uteh, just came in."

Burton joined them outside the hut. The Malay was wolfing food and drink and made boastful report in badly mangled English. He had killed two officers and seven soldiers that day. The Japs had pushed on into the night, but had finally bivouaced while a few native scouts kept going. His comrades would engage and slow up those scouts and slip away before dawn, coming into camp then. His report made, he curled up beside his rifle and sumpitan, and was asleep.

"You take the watch," said the Padre. "Waken Hunter at two o'clock; that'll give him a good sleep. Keep a rifle at hand. Some of those Jap scouts may work around and get here before the Malays."

Rifle and drum of cartridges ready, Burton took up his watch. Somewhere far away in the night, he heard the faint sound of a distant rifle-shot—just one. Distant, yes, but it meant the enemy was drawing on and would be here with the sun.

XVI

IT WAS a lonely vigil, with that oppressive certainty of battle approaching unseen through the night.

The valley of the ancient crater was silent as death; there was no stir in the air, yet the sky was alive with the eternal winking of the stars. Several times a vibration pierced the stillness—a far-off shot, felt rather than heard. Once, at no great distance, Burton caught the sound that had shivered through him while he was at the truck with Tom Hunter—the deep angry cough of a tiger.

Two o'clock came and passed; Burton let Hunter sleep on, for he himself had no need. A burst of sound reached him . . . a distinct rippling burst from automatic rifles. Scattered shots followed it, then silence. He could almost picture those Malays catching scouts or soldiers unawares and pouring bullets in upon them, then slipping away in the night while the Japs fired at shadows.

Figures flitted in the starlight. Burton blinked, looked again; they were like shadows in that deceptive half-light. He knew at once they were not Japs, however. They were coming straight along the trail, not dispersed, as men who knew it well. These were the Malays.

He wakened Hunter at once. They met the little group of staggering, exhausted but fiercely delighted little brown men; not one had been lost, though two were wounded. Guttural Malay spattered back and forth between them and Hunter, who then showed them where food was and told them to go

on under the cliffs and sleep in the caves there. Rifle under arm, Hunter rejoined Burton, ready to take his watch.

"They gave those scouts a bloody lesson —caught them in a bunch and wiped them out," he reported. "That was four miles back along the trail. The Japs won't come along now until daylight. You go back to sleep."

Burton obeyed, thinking of those shots he had heard; he had interpreted them aright.

Daylight and the smell of tea wakened him. Sunrise was at hand. The Padre and Hunter had prepared a mighty meal—could be the last, said Hunter, so make the most of what there was. Loaded down with food and drink, the Padre went off to the group at the cliffs.

"We aim to spread out—me here, you in the mess-hut yonder, Padre over on the other side," Hunter said, as they ate. "I've put ca'tridges around already. The idea is to engage 'em as they come along, tease 'em a bit, hold 'em till the main force comes up, then cut and run. The big doings come later."

"Sun's coming up," said Burton. Stupid words, he thought. But Hunter gave him a queer look and a nod.

"Uh-huh. Funny, ain't it, how you never notice things like that—till maybe the last time? Well, here's luck. The signal to skedaddle will be two shots close together from the Padre. See you back at the cliffs."

Burton departed to the mess-hut.

IT WAS a place of pathetic indications—the few cooking utensils, lugged so far and now abandoned in utter haste, the painfully erected and patched kitchen and eating arrangements, the tiny trifles left behind—a knife here, a Jap ration box there. Burton settled down at the side of the cookstove, which was built of rocks cemented together, laid out his spare ammunition, tore out a strip of the thatched side wall in front, and inspected his field of fire.

Except for scattered trees, this was fairly open—he could see up the trail to the bamboo clumps and the beginning of the jungle vegetation that walled in the horizon. Not much cover close by for any Japs, he thought. He glanced around. Hunter was out of sight. The Padre had come back from the cliffs but he, too, was out of sight. The camp was apparently deserted and empty.

And now, suddenly, he saw them. His blood jumped, his nerves twitched—then he was cool and quiet and alertly ready at his loophole. He picked up the glasses.

Where the trail down from the jungle rim broke into the verge of scattered trees back from the lake shore, stealthy figures had oozed from the heavy cover. The sun flashed above the high horizon and threw them into relief, advertised their movements amid the long level shadows.

The slight morning haze spread by the lake confused the lenses and he laid the glasses aside. He did not need them. By their contours, these were not native scouts pressed into enemy service. Any such scouts had been very effectively beaten by Hunter's Malays, back up the trail; might have been wiped out, as the Malays themselves had boasted. At any rate, those natives were not needed here and probably had small stomach for taking the advance where the going was plain. Having spied and reported, they would pass the deal to the Japs.

These were Japs, crouched low, scuttling from shadow to shadow like bugs. Between them and the camp were only the spaced trees for shelter. The shore of the lake was bare.

A reach of the shore flanked the camp with a wide finger that had to be crossed in the approach to the huts, with their concealing clumps of trees. All this open stretch, within sure range, lay fair and inviting to the rifles.

Burton gently fingered his automatic weapon, pulled the reserve of slim cartridges over for quick grasp, and steadied the barrel upon the rest afforded by the loophole. The camp was spangled with light and shade, but the eaves of the hut shaded the muzzle from the sunlight, mounting swiftly with each moment.

He surmised that the Padre and Hunter were of his own mind: that open space was the deadline. Once there, the ringtails would come in a rush, probably in full confidence that they had surprised the camp. Yet they knew damned well that they had been discovered on the way here, and might reason that since all opposition had ceased, their enemies had cleared out. In their matter-of-fact mental processes, they would not figure

that these flimsy huts, with no scouts posted on lookout, no signs of life, were occupied.

Burton's thoughts roved. Did the Japs know about the camp? They must know about the lake; but had those last Jap planes, the low-flying bombers on swoop to inspect the valley closely, spotted the camp and any telltale tokens? Base camp, women in it. . . .

The women! Josie, poor old Lady Bess, the smiling brown girls—God! He had no hesitancy in appealing to God. There was a Power, a saving Power, as demonstrated in his own experiences. The women! What did the future store up for those women, waiting in the cavern?

So the thoughts swirled across his brain, as he watched the Japs over his rifle sight; it punctuated the view beyond the thatch opening. They were nearer now, larger. In the background the solid mass of a column was just trudging into view.

Ha—the pulsating drone of a plane! A plane . . . a Jap plane? No, it must be a Lightning, returned and in time with its bursts of lead to blast the column. But the Japs had not heard it, for they came straight on. And he had not heard it either. He realized the truth, and relaxed. The sound was only that of the blood booming through his ears, made loud there by the tense silence all around.

It became apparent that the Japs had not known about the camp. Their advance through the scattered trees slackened pace, to weave and crane about inquiringly. A stocky fellow in the lead halted and held up a warning hand. The others closed in and halted. One presently ran back for the column. He fetched up an officer—a short, waddling officer with glint of spectacles and decorations. There was something familiar about him. Burton hastily applied the binoculars. This was the spectacled, buck-toothed colonel whom he had seen examining maps on the road, that day at the hunting-strip—a hundred years ago, it seemed.

COMING in full sight of the camp, the colonel stopped, peered, and whipped up a pair of field-glasses. Burton promptly drew back his rifle and waited. Buck-tooth swept the shore and the trees and the huts, and this apparently satisfied him. With a shrug and a nod he turned about and waddled back for his command. A hardboiled specimen whose looks boded no good to the helpless. Burton lusted to put a bullet into him, but held his fire.

The men on reconnaissance hesitated, probably suspicious of the profound silence. Somewhere the Padre was poised to strike; no arrangement had been made, but it was up to the Padre, commanding, to open the game. Somewhere Hunter was in a cold glare of impatience to lengthen his vengeance-roll. Burton felt the tug of coming action . . . action which would only postpone the certain end. Yet it would bridge the interval, with lustful killing, until that inevitable end would come.

He wondered what Josie was doing now, what the little Rajah was thinking, with ears tunded for the echoes of battle. The Rajah was a fatalist but he would not relish hiding in a hole. "Why do we fight and hide and run?" he had complained once. Josie had said she wished to go out free, in the open, facing the end unafraid. And Lady Bess? Well, Lady Bess didn't much care what happened; the poor soul might have a bad period of waiting ahead.

About all this was something queer and unreal. Burton found himself not accepting the end of things as now seemed in sight—a mad pursuit, a running down, a killing, a hopeless fight to the death. Somewhere, somehow there must be hope! But in his heart he knew there was none. The signal had been made, had been recognized, too late.

They were coming now, advancing with caution, separating in loose formation. They gained confidence as they came into the open, leaning forward, rifles held ready, grenades and field-packs and canteens jiggling.

Burton sighted upon the chest of the stocky Jap in the lead and his finger began to close on the trigger. The Japs should be caught well out beyond cover. It was a long minute to wait. . . .

A startling angry rifle-crack shivered the silence. That was the Padre. Even as Burton pulled off and his weapon heated with the rapid shots, he sensed that the right of the skirmish line was melting to fragments. His man was down, plunging forward to the first shot. As he swept his weapon from man to man, he realized that Hunter was at work. All the Jap line was riddled, was

broken with stagger and stumble and final plunge. Good shooting!

They were stopped cold. A few answering bullets whistled, but the skirmishers were on the run, what was left of them. The automatics cracked on. Down they sprawled, one and another. The last man fell at the edge of the trees, but moved on, crawling to cover, and Hunter's angry voice committed him to the devil as he vanished.

The column had vanished, but rifles were barking furiously and bullets splattering the thatch of the huts. Burton snatched at his glasses. They showed him the troops scattering for positions, breaking up and forming anew—a puzzling matter. Bucktooth was in full sight, directing operations. For what? A furious direct assault? But the Japs could not know that only three men were facing them. Those automatic rifles were the very devil.

"Everybody all right?" sounded the voice of the Padre, at level pitch.

"Okay here," Burton replied. He felt glad of companionship.

"Top-hole here," responded Tom Hunter. "Will they rush us?"

"Remains to be seen," came the Padre's reply.

"Well, I'm primed! Give 'em the second barrel!"

"What about dropping that officer?" sang out Burton.

"Not yet," the Padre replied. "You'll get my signal. We want to hold 'em as long as possible. That's our job."

"And then play from a new deck," chimed in Hunter's voice.

Silence again. The chattering, distant voice of Bucktooth came fitful on the air; the morning was without a breath of air. Burton focused his glasses again. He sensed something deadly in the deliberation yonder.

He made out movement. A detachment was working to their left, the side of the jungled hills. Another party was heading for the lake shore side on the right. Others were coming straight on for the open stretch, then halted. A strutty little officer advanced into the open, a white flag held high — a handkerchief tied to his sword. Well in the clear, he halted with heels together and lifted his voice in English words:

"Hello, hello! Surrender selves. All soldiers treated as right by laws of war. Please save lives of helpless."

Burton grunted. Did they know about the women, or think that the camp held the whole company? Or were they simply making a wary stall for time?

"Get out!" The Padre's voice was prompt and curt. "You have one minute."

With an about-face, the mannikin stiffly retired to cover, taking the flag from his sword as he went. But then came movement, swift with precision. His central detachment broke out into the clear. There were two squads, and a skirmish line—machine-guns and support . . . light machine-guns, now assembled behind shields. The support flattened and came inching forward, their helmets forming a row of turtle-backs, with rudder tails wallowing behind.

The detachment on the enemy's right was working into the first growth of the flowing jungle which gradually submerged the crater rim. A flanking effort, there. The detachment on their left was darting at the lake shore—men were taking to the water, were wading, were shoulder-deep. With rifles elevated by one arm, they were starting to swim.

So that was it! A diversion in front, by machine-guns and support, and an encirclement on right and left, by water and jungle cover. All to do for three men! Burton had to laugh to himself, wryly. The joke might look to be on the Nips, but when time came to break for the cliffs, the joke might lose its savor.

The camp's clump of trees was fairly well out from the jungle to the rear. The Japs seeking cover there could be let alone; they would expect an evacuation in that direction, not an escape by way of the shore, southward toward the cliffs. So those ringtails in front might be left for the Padre to work over. The Japs in the water formed the real menace.

All this in a momentary flash. The machine-guns fired a tentative burst; the lead pelted among the trees and huts. The rifles began to clatter spasmodically, bullets whined with vicious whistle. With that, the Padre opened on the skirmishers.

Hunter, turning sharpshooter, sniped at the men in the lake. A dozen or more were swimming stoutly, two hundred yards out,

as though to round the camp, while others had started at scratch. Burton added his fire to that of Hunter.

The marks were small, but the Japs had to swim at a side crawl in order to keep their rifles above water. The hot lead from the automatics raised tracer spray; the aim was corrected. Down fell arm and rifle; helmets rang, swimmers floundered like dying fish in the shallows or went under completely. Hunter must be enjoying himself, thought Burton.

The firing from the mess hut must have caught the eye, for a sudden burst of machine-gun fire ripped through the thatching. Burton grabbed his ammunition and dived out the entrance, which faced the lake. With another jump he holed in behind a tree. It gave him wider angle for his fire.

And a lucky move it was. There was a swish and a thud, a smart explosion mingled with a belated dull report. The hut billowed out, the walls buckled, smoke burst forth and flame darted through the thatching. A mortar shell! Those brown devils under cover were using tripod mortars, to burn the camp and smoke out the defense!

XVII

SO THE tactics were clear enough now. The mortars would blow hell out of the camp. The jungle shelter to which the defenders would presumably run, was invested to trap them. The machine-guns fronted another possible exit. The Japs by water would envelop the shore flank and cut off flight by that route. Not badly conceived, thought Burton.

The mortar was now regularly lobbing in shells, apparently incendiary bombs whose smoke would hide any advance by the Japs. The flames spread by leaps, the smoke grew more thick. The mess hut burned fiercely and Burton was driven from his tree. He moved toward the Padre's position and hugged the ground waiting.

The Japs in the water had been halted, at least. Two were at some distance out in the lake, the others were sunk or crippled. The starters at scratch had stayed there. High time for the Padre to signal, thought Burton.

The smoke was settling, clouding everything and began to screen off the lake.

"Burton!" That was the Padre's voice, startlingly close. "You there?"

"Okay," said Burton.

"Where's Hunter?"

"Dunno."

"We'll have to make for the cliffs. This smoke will help cover us. Oh, so there you are!"

The Padre emerged from the smoke and the heat-waves. His lean features were red, his brows singed off, his shirt pocked with cinders.

"Mortar . . . damnable!" he coughed. "The Nips have worked around. Hunter!"

"Coming, Padre," was the response, and here was the figure of Hunter breasting in through the reek.

"Hell's afire with the door open," Hunter brayed harshly. "What are we waiting for, Padre?"

"You. All right. Better keep back from the shore and take advantage of the smoke as much as possible. It was bad, now it's good. Gives us a chance to make the cliffs."

They lost no time getting away from the south edge of the camp. Bullets were pouring into the huts, among the trees; the Japs were doing a thorough job of it.

The air cooled, a drift of smoke clung to them as they hurried along; all the huts were in a blaze back there. Objects cleared, the view of the lake shore and lake became clear; the three of them were in the open and the smoke blew away from them.

A chuckle escaped the Padre.

"They think we're still in the bag, back there—"

"Like hell!" snarled Hunter. "Looky yonder! Some of 'em coming to life!"

They looked lakewards. One of the farther swimmers had raised like a seal to peer at the shore. He flourished an arm and his voice rang and chattered across the water. Other heads were bobbing. A trail of Japs were coming along in the water, were echoing the yells of the first swimmer.

Hunter swore. His rifle lifted, he squinted earnestly and let drive. Again and again he fired; again and again that farther Jap bobbed up and then went under, unhurt.

"Hell diver, not a duck!" rasped Hunter.

They hurried along, Burton paused for a shot or two at the swimmers, with no luck.

"Well, they'll all have our direction now," he said.

"And our muster," added the Padre gravely, "and they'll be after the rest. Now they know where to look they'll soon pick up the trail."

"And we'll be expecting them," Hunter said with grim expectancy.

"And after that the gorge—we ought to do pretty well there."

"Pretty well nowhere!" snarled Hunter. "These damned Nips have blasted us out of the village and they'll blast us out of our moorings everywhere before we know it. Too smart for us, that's what. Wait and see."

A gloomy prospect. Perhaps that cavern in the gorge would be a trap after all. If it were not for those women, for the baby . . . well, the men were not footloose to fight and die. The end might be closer than anyone thought. Burton glanced at the Padre.

"Got any plans, Padre?"

The other shook his head vaguely. "We can plan, but the Boss who rules things does as He likes. Apparently no one is on our trail yet. We can only do as we have begun and accept what comes."

So the Padre had turned fatalist too, knowing there was no hope.

They were bearing off to the right. The camp was shut away by the contour of the shore line. The light thatch of the huts had been quickly consumed but the smoke bombs still fogged the air. No doubt the Japs would probe the captured camp, then reorganize.

Burton was conscious of his smarting hide and his wounded side. The cliffs rose ahead, buttressing the way on around the lake end. They quickened pace, Hunter waving to those awaiting them. Everything seemed void and empty, but they came up to find slit trenches and the rock-bedded machine-guns and men securely posted. Here were Cocky, Rawlins, Lejeune, Livermore, Saunders, Thorne and six of the eight Malays, the other two being with the Rajah as bodyguards.

"I see you got roasted out," bantered Cocky Bolt with a grin.

"We ticketed a few Japs first, for a worse roasting," said Hunter.

"Did they have flame-throwers?" shot out Lejeune. Burton shook his head.

"No. Mortars and smoke bombs—incendiaries. No firebugs so far."

The Padre was brisk enough now. He took charge with no waste of time, ordering the hidden machine-guns further camouflaged with brush.

"Three men to each gun—have your stations ready, but leave the guns for a smashing surprise. Everybody ready with rifles, and hold your fire, stay out of sight. We want to do them so much damage here that it'll give them a good hard check."

The trenches were scooped deeper, positions were taken, ammunition laid ready. This nest of scattered rocks beneath the cliff-corner would give the Nips something to think about. All hands were watching the camp. The drift of smoke was lessening.

"There they are," grunted Cocky.

Dim figures appeared in the reek—scouts, suspiciously questing like dogs on a warming trail. Burton felt his spine crawl with eagerness and heard the quickened breath of Cocky, beside him. Then somebody in the rear rapped out an oath.

"Oh, hell! Look what's comin'—behind!"

Burton turned, and echoed the oath. A flutter of white—it was Lady Bess, in her parachute draperies, hurrying over the basalt layers of the lake basin, making in for the cliffs and the strip beneath them. Well back of her showed another figure, by the garb and lithe movement that of Josie, in anxious pursuit.

"Gone off her head," surmised Cocky, all too correctly.

"And it's a dead giveaway," spoke up Hunter. "Blast it! All's off now."

"Burton!" came the Padre's crisp voice. "Quick! Go turn them back—we can't have them here. Go stop the poor creature."

A shout had burst from the Jap scouts; that distant running figure had given away the game; no use thinking now about concealment. Burton jumped up and broke into a run.

A bullet sang past him, a shot answered it. There would be no surprise now.

He kept going, angry dismay tugging at him as he lumbered along under the cliffs to meet the running shapes. His anger died as he neared them and saw the wild, distraught features of Lady Bess—the poor woman had gone off her head, all right.

"Stop!" he called to her. "Stop, Lady Bess! Go back! No place for you here."

She halted, looked around vacantly, and

her eyes fastened upon him. Josie was hurrying to catch up.

"My place is with Sir Anthony at the camp," she cried.

"He's all right," panted Burton. "He wants you to go back to the cave."

Lady Bess, with piteous defiant shake of her gray locks, refused.

"No, no! Let me pass!"

Josie came up.

"I'll handle it, Yank. Here, Lady Bess! The Rajah wants you to come back. The baby's crying for you, understand? You slipped away before we knew where you were going. The baby wants you."

That drove home. Lady Bess turned to her.

"The baby? Oh, very well. I'm sure Sir Anthony would not have me distress the baby. He is very fond of the little darling."

"I'd better go along for a bit," said Burton. Josie dissented. She had the pistol that Hunter had given her.

"You bloody well shan't, Yank! You're needed back there. I can handle her. Come along, Lady Bess, come along! The baby's crying."

WITH the older woman now docile and yielding to the extended hand, they set off on the back trail together. Burton went jogging back for the position, where a few rifles were cracking out. He looked back once, to see Josie and Lady Bess nimbly going it around the lake-end for the offshoot trail to the gorge and cave.

But others had seen them, as well.

With the position now revealed, the Jap skirmishers had spread out and gone to earth, and the main forces behind had apparently halted. Burton came up to the trenches, to hear a mutter of curses. He looked back as he dropped for cover. The heads out in the lake had increased in number and changed course. Now they were furrowing across to cut off the two women. Good swimmers, those Japs.

An eager yelp, and another, came from at hand. The Padre was talking in Malay. With sudden action they were up and in motion, brown shadows stripped to the skin. A few bullets were singing overhead — no matter.

Two of them went away, racing like deer, on the land trail to catch up with the women. The other four went into the water, made it safely, and their heads lined out.

All firing ceased. Interest centered upon the scene far outspread — the hurrying women, the swimming Japs, the swimming Malays. The courses of the Japs and the four Malays were converging; it would be knife to knife, with the Malays outnumbered. All beyond rifle-shot there, yet clear to every eye.

The Jap soldiery, still screened by drifting and lessening smoke, were in some sort of motion; impossible to tell what was doing, but at all events they were not advancing. No doubt Bucktooth was trying to reach some understanding of the general situation, while awaiting the issue of the water-race.

"Women allus make trouble," said somebody disgustedly. "The poor old lady sure as hell spiked our guns for us."

Yet nobody could blame her; there was only pity for Lady Bess.

Out there in the lake, though details were hidden, there was not long to wait. The angle of swimmers was narrowing to a point.

Then the point was blunted in a swirl, the sun flashed from steel, the side lines swung together and the surface broke into flurries of spray.

On shore, Josie and Lady Bess had faced about as though realizing what was up and clutched by dismay. The two Malays afoot were running in, low and small and swift.

Two figures came staggering from the water. They were Japs. After them came crawling on hands and knees one of the Malays, but they disregarded him; they had eyes and thought only for the two women, and launched into a stumbling run. The two Malays afoot, running for the finish, would arrive too late—but one of them flashed out his arm. The sun glinted on steel, a kris darting like an arrow shaft. The leading Jap flung back his head and went swaying aside and fell, and the wounded Malay crawled at him to finish it.

The remaining Jap was for the two women, was upon them. Josie's arm crooked and stabbed out with telltale distant report. Before the report reached across the water, the Jap plunged headlong, then came to one knee. Lady Bess advanced at measured step, a rock poised in both hands, and cast it

down upon him as though smashing the head of a reptile.

It was finished. The crawling Malay and the hurt Jap lay, after one brief upheaval, side by side. The two Malay runners did not try to return. With Josie and Lady Bess they hurried on to the trail, and the four disappeared.

To Burton all this appeared to happen in a pent breath, but it had taken much longer than seemed.

A DIN of screams and shouts burst from the Jap advance. It came now, and came full force, with bullets whistling and rifles crackling. No stopping that rush with rifles; the hidden machine-guns gave tongue. The yells voiced fury and surprise and dismay. The charging shapes spilled to earth. The attack was broken. It scattered and ducked for cover, leaving tumbled dead sprawled behind. It was gone.

"Look out for snipers," yelled someone. "Keep down!"

Burton refilled the magazine of his kicking rifle. Cocky, beside him, chortled.

"Hey! We sure stopped 'em cold! Too bad those damned women showed the others where to go next. Well, we're safe here for a bit—"

Whang! An explosion ten feet away cut short the exultant chatter. It burst like a bolt from the sky. Another and another,

rocking the air, showering trenches and machine-guns with splinters, with bloody flesh, with sand and stones. Stifled cries sounded.

The Japs, stealing around during that lull, had gained the cliffs from behind and were sending down grenades from above. Another burst in air, impact of the shock bearing Burton down into the sand.

"Under the cliffs, into the cave, everybody!" shouted the Padre.

The position was now untenable. Burton was up and off with the others, in a dash that carried them into shelter. He saw Hunter pause for an instant, and jerk up rifle, then let go. In response, a body came tumbling down from the cliff top. Then all of them were into the cave of the stone images, panting, swearing, furious.

"What's the damage?" cried the Padre. His stubbled lean face was bloody from a gash athwart the cheek but his eyes were set hard and cold.

"Arm busted," spoke up Saunders. "Rawlins and Thorne blowed to a pulp alongside me.

Only two gone? It seemed incredible that so many had survived those bursting grenades. Nearly all were hurt somewhat, Saunders the worst.

"We'll have to get out of here!" cried Lejeune. "A flame thrower will turn this hole into hell itself!"

"Aye," added Cocky. "I'm for a break. I don't aim to burn before I have to."

"Right," said the Padre. "Hold everything, now . . ."

The cave was resounding with deafening blasts. Machine-gun fire was chipping the rocks at the entrance, grenades raised a smother of smoke and sand and shrapnel fragments. The Japs were throwing everything they had at the hole, before advancing.

"Ready, now," went on the Padre with energy. "They'll quit to take stock—then make the break. Not by the lake route, but out of here and around the corner of the cliff. Head for the gorge. We'll have more cover from their fire."

"It's longer around that way," objected Burton.

"They already know the other way. They'll follow the women, blast it! Everybody stand by for the order when a lull shows."

Saunders came to Burton, mutely extending a first-aid kit—a Japanese kit, of which plenty were on hand. Burton went to work. The compound fracture from a grenade burst looked ugly. He worked mechanically, bandaging the hurt and making a sling for the arm. He was still thinking about the Padre's last words.

"But look, Padre!" he broke out. "They're sure to follow us as well!"

"I suppose so, Burton. What can we do about it?"

"Nothing, I guess."

Only too true. Things were not going as planned. This machine-gun position should have held the Japs until night fell. Now it was already lost.

"Sounds like a lull," warned the Padre. "Ready, all! Leg it!"

They were out—not in the open, but sidling along close to the smoke-wreathed rock of the cliff, dashing for the turn of it, hurling themselves forward and then up at the steep slope mounting between the cliff and the hill behind.

They made it unhurt, perhaps unseen; there was no telling. They struggled upward by brush and thorn, straining every nerve and sinew. By the absence of flying lead there was no immediate pursuit at least. The vengeful clamor behind had ceased as if the enemy were blanked by the bootless haul—two dead men and an empty position dearly bought.

It was a rough, hard climb over the long hill-shoulder and into the gorge well beyond, and a long climb. Apparently the Padre had chosen his moment well for the dash, or the enemy had been too intent on the trail taken by the two women. Exhausted and stumbling, they came down into the narrow cut between the hills, and Burton recognized it with relief. Somewhere here would be the end of everything.

They filed along the gorge, and came to the spatter of rocks that concealed the opening of the farther cavern chamber. No sign of the opening appeared from below; the slope looked naked and uninviting. They went on to the rocks beyond where the direct cave entrance was likewise safely out of sight.

A masked machine-gun was mounted here, and two Malays were on guard with rifles. The narrow mouth of the cave opened, and Josie appeared.

"Good!" she exclaimed eagerly. "We saw you coming. But everyone's not here!"

"So it seems," rejoined Cocky. "Wouldn't mind a long drink with a straw in it."

"You might take a look at the Padre's face," added Burton. "Sit down, Padre. Your turn to get tied up."

"All right, all right." The Padre yielded. "Hunter, tell the Malays to watch the gorge—both ways. Josie—the Rajah's here?"

"Yes. He and the others are in the end chamber," Josie rejoined, washing his grimed and bloody cheek. "Hold still, now. Did you see the plane?"

"What plane?"

"One came quite a while back—when the fight at the camp was going on. It was over the lake. One of the Malays recognized the Jap markings. It circled as though to come down, then made off."

The Padre exchanged a glance with Burton.

"No, we didn't see it. Too busy."

Burton recalled that odd fantasy he had felt—a strafing Lightning in the nick of time! That had been the hope when the blood boomed in his ears. But there had been no reality, no miracle. And no use thinking about it now.

They all filed into the long, narrow entrance cave, where the second machine-gun was posted as final resort. The rank smell of sulphur and of bats was strong, the dried guano stirred into dust underfoot. Most of the men flung themselves down there, gulping at the ready water. Burton, with Cocky, followed the Padre through the familiar passage and over the shaking chasm bridge—no jumping it now, with jaded body—and on to the vaulted chamber. But, as he reflected upon that hovering plane, he nevertheless had an uneasy feeling. Nothing was going as it should—nothing! What worse could happen than the unexpected?

XVIII

RAJAH ALI, his four wives and Lady Bess were here in the queer chamber of petrified things. The Rajah was seated like a potentate in the narrow daylight of the opening, placidly drawing upon a cigarette, his head and shoulder bandaged with

clean white, his gold-hafted kris between his knees. His brown wives squatted in a half circle beside him, while Lady Bess erectly paced too and fro with the brown naked baby in her arm. The scene was startlingly domestic, as compared with the morning's savage work.

To Burton it was sadly evident that Lady Bess had gone completely over the deep end. She smiled and nodded at the arrivals, displayed no curiosity about events, and spoke proudly of the child.

"Pretty! See how he smiles. Sir Anthony and I have become very fond of him. Some day he will be a Rajah."

Rajah Ali smilingly shifted about and gave calm greeting.

"Welcome. I saw you coming down the gorge. I had two men here, but they went out to scout the trails and bring word if the enemy comes. No bad news?"

"No good, certainly." The Padre slumped down wearily and accepted a cigarette. "Four of your men gone, as you probably know. Thorne and Rawlins checked out; Saunders has a broken arm. The Nips were just too smart for us—mortars, smoke bombs, grenades, clever tactics."

"I dare say they'll be along, eh?" Rajah Ali observed.

"Undoubtedly. They know where to pick up the trail, and it's marked by the trips over it. We may give them a nasty surprise when they get here, but that's all."

"Very well. We're inside, they're outside," said the Rajah. "Are you still hoping for American planes, Mr. Burton."

"I'm hoping for nothing," growled Burton. The Rajah's placid air irritated him. "Even if a plane came, we couldn't reach it. The only place it could come down is on the lake."

"Why worry? We think to act, but Allah alone decides," came the calm response. "We have plenty of water and rations, praise be, so you chaps pitch in. Tell me about the fighting I've missed. Even with one arm—" and he touched the haft of his kris—"I may do my bit when the time comes."

They ate, drank, relaxed, discussed the drear and uninspiring details of the fighting thus far. The Rajah was intent upon the story, when Cocky's head jerked up.

"Hello! What's outside?"

One of the women, watching at the opening, uttered a low word. From outside came a slithering of loose rock, then the figure of a Malay, blood running from his thigh, came lurching inside. The Rajah made sharp demand, and was answered.

"He says the Japs are nearing the gorge," the Rajah translated, "coming by the way we've been using. He and the other man were pursued; a chance bullet wounded him. The other man sought the cave entrance; he came straight here."

Next moment, indeed, came Josie with a scurry of haste from the passage.

"A scout is in. Hunter says the Japs are coming—oh! Then you know!"

She checked herself, seeing the wounded man, whom the women were tending. The Rajah nodded quietly.

"Oh, yes. Sit down. Have a cigarette."

"We'd better get posted," said the Padre, rising. "Burton, Cocky—come along. You will please keep back from the opening, Rajah. We don't want them to locate the cave entrances till the last minute, and this one may afford a way out."

"Out—to what?" queried the Rajah pleasantly, but he had no answer.

So it was back again to the first entrance, leaving here the Rajah and his wives and his wounded Malay, with Lady Bess still transported to another world by the baby in her arms. Josie insisted on coming along to use a rifle. One by one they made the crossing of the gulf by the shaky, perilous bridge.

"Wasted a lot of work," said Cocky, waiting his turn, "toting in all those supplies. We thought we'd hold out for days; we'll be lucky if we see the sun set."

Burton had no reply; it was too true.

At the entrance, the Padre made his dispositions. Josie and one Malay were posted inside the entrance by the machine-gun. The retreat would rally on this to defend the cave itself. At the gun outside were posted Livermore, Lejeune and Saunders, who insisted that one arm could help feed a belt. This gun was well hidden in a rocky niche, for quick uncovering at need.

Flanking it, with rifles and grenades, were the two last Malays, little brown men content to die for their chief, with Burton, Hunter, Cocky Bolt and the Padre, scattered among the rocks, securely placed. The orders were not to fire until necessary; let

the Nips search, crowd into the narrow gorge, victims for grenades and guns.

They settled down to wait. It was the last stand. Nerves had quieted, speech was scanty, the hot sun was past the noon mark and high: cartridges and grenades were disposed under cover from the burning rays. There was not long to endure.

At last! A trickle of advance scouts, filtering through the rocks and spare growth of the gorge, cautiously working along. Behind them followed the main force in groups, some packing burdens, gun parts, mortars, whatnot. The skirmishes came and passed the hidden watchers, seeking and finding nothing. The groups behind followed on, split up, scattered out and hesitated, wary of a trap; uncertainty was evident.

Once more the little mannikin officer with the white flag came strutting into the foreground. Fingers itched on triggers, as his voice lifted.

"Hallo! You like to fight? It will be no use. Listen, thank you. Give in now, everybody alive and happy."

There was no response from the emptiness. He paused, spoke again.

"Who stay there, die. This time hell for sure. This is last chance to send out all women, everybody who surrender."

Silence again. And then, incredibly, a voice lifted upon that silence—the high, clear, English voice of Lady Bess.

"Tell the little beast what he is, Padre!"

BURTON heard a low groan from the hidden men, and echoed it. What the devil had brought her into the cave, to spoil everything once again? Instantly, the Japs darted into motion, scattering out, sending skirmishers up the hillsides. Her voice had sprung all the field into action, revealing the carefully hidden position.

The strutting officer burst into a laugh. He dropped his white flag, turned to make cover, and with gleeful insolence patted his butt. The spanging crack of Hunter's rifle crashed on the silence. The officer gave one jack-rabbit leap and legged it, his arm hanging. Burton sighted, caught the mark, and fired. Good! Down to stay this time.

"All bets off!" called the Padre. "Gun crew, hold fire if you can—"

Rifles cracked. The location was spotted, but the cave itself would still be a surprise. Figures agile as apes scuttled for the rocks to the right and left. Gun crew hold its fire? Not a chance. Already a rush was forming, was coming.

Even while he worked his rifle, Burton did not miss the beautiful precision with which those Japs fell to work. Skirmishers were out, snipers were firing, a machine-gun crew was setting up its piece, well away in the rear a mortar was being emplaced—all like speedy clockwork.

This was grim reality, not the fiction of a heroic cinema. The enemy suffered, but in a matter of seconds were pouring in a crushing fire from all directions to cover the frontal assault. This ran squarely into a blaze as the machine-gun uncovered and blasted it away, and went on to blast the Jap machine-gunners.

Burton, head cool and quiet, saw the folly. Everyone around him was trigger-happy; only trained men should handle automatic arms. The assault had failed bloodily, but all at once drums were empty, men had to reload. A storm of bullets poured in from the Japs, and snipers were deadly. The rocks gave cover to the attack as well as to the defense.

The Malays, all together, ran amok—victims of the queer nervous disease that seizes upon the brown folk. The man from the cave, the other two, sprang out screaming and yelling, rushing at the enemy. What happened was hard to see, for now the mortar was at work. A shell landed short of the position. Another followed and burst almost beside the machine-gun. The Japs were rushing again. The dust and smoke broke to show Saunders on his feet, grenade in hand poised for the throw. He was awkward and slow; the grenade burst in his hand, as another shell from the mortar exploded in a great blossom of dust and death.

Burton ducked back for the cave. Hunter made it, the Padre made it, Lejeune made it, Cocky Bolt came staggering in beside Josie, who stood white and staring. Lejeune was excitedly jabbering in French. Another mortar shell exploded outside.

"Well, we're done," said the Padre huskily. Josie gave him water; he thanked her. "They've lost more than a few, out there."

"So have we," croaked Cocky Bolt, still jaunty. "Grenades and machine-gun ready?"

Ready, yes. Josie set down the bucket of water.

"I'll keep watch," she said, and advanced to the cave entrance. She flashed Burton one tremulous smile as she passed him.

THEY washed, reloaded, lit cigarettes. There was no urge to talk: heaviness sat upon them all. No heroism, no dramatics, just the ugly facts. Grenades were ready, the machine-gun grinned, the Japs would certainly come at the hole there where Josie crouched and watched.

Dully, Burton's mind played with it all. How easy it had looked, a while back, to hold off the enemy, to make a grand fight of it—and how wretchedly hopeless was this reality! At the camp, at the cliffs, and here . . . blundering amateur work, no less. These Japs were professionals. The little company had narrowed down in no time.

It was cool here in the passage. The water was a reconditioner of parched throats, and burned skin. From outside came occasional lifted voices. The thick guano deposits on floor and walls stirred into dust, wafted by the air-currents along the passage.

Josie had turned an excited face, was making gestures, was holding out a hand in appeal. Burton was the one to guess her meaning. He caught up a grenade and quickly stepped toward her, footstep silent in the dust. She crouched, craned back toward him, gestured caution, and seized the grenade. A voice came from outside . . . close, close!

"Hallo, in there! Surrender selves! Come out, we talk. Yes?"

Josie stiffened, pulled the grenade pin with her teeth, waited, hurled it out through the opening, and fell flat. The burst came, jarring the air, fragments flying around; from outside came animal screams of rage and pain. Josie scrambled back hastily.

"Four of them, grenades ready . . . look out, now! We'll catch it!"

"All right, sister—scram!" snapped out Cocky, jumping to the machine-gun with Lejeune and the Padre. "You've done your part. Scram! Get out!"

Josie obeyed him, surprisingly. She disappeared.

"Look out, you guys," exclaimed Hunter morosely. "Ain't going to be what you look for—nothing is in this damned game. Watch out for tricks."

The screams outside had yielded to other voices . . . calls, orders, an excited rally to the kill. Hunter lay over his rifle, waiting. Burton seized a couple of grenades and edged forward. He heard sounds from outside—grunts, scrambling of rocks. One after the other, he pulled the pins and heaved the grenades out the opening, and ducked back.

The blasts set off an inferno. A hurricane broke upon the cave face. Hammering lead and smacking bombs hammered at the embrasure, grenades lobbed in with bursting spindrift of splinters. A thick haze of dust, acrid and choking, filled the cave, clogging eyes and lungs. Instantly, Burton perceived how useless was the machine-gun here—the Japs were not going to come crowding in to be slaughtered. They would do the slaughtering first.

The bursts lessened. Hunter was yelling something unheard. A queer blowy hiss filled the air. Lejeune uttered a shrill scream like a panicked horse. He jumped away from the gun, caught up a grenade and pulled the pin as he darted at the entrance.

"I can't, I can't!" he shrieked. "I can't stand it!"

Burton thought he had gone mad, but no—Hunter shouted again, caught Burton's arm and jerked. The Padre was crowding back too.

Lejeune was throwing the grenade when it came. Hunter must have known the sound. It was not an explosion but a great whirlpool of flame and scorching heat licking into the passage and swept along by the draft, mantling the fouled walls and ceiling with filigree of fire, licking up the guano on the floor—

A "firebug" at work. Burton stared aghast. What of Lejeune. He had vanished. The machine-gun had vanished. The whole cave entrance was ruddy and reeking like a furnace. Cocky and Hunter pressed frantically back against Burton and the Padre.

"Out! Out!" came Cocky's yell. "The ammunition—grenades—get out quick!"

Half blinded, they groped their way for safety, the incandescent mass behind them still vomiting explosions. Everything back there was gone. Remained only the big chamber at the end—a sanctuary for time, long or short, as might be.

XIX

THEY came to the rickety bridge and crossed; lungs cleared in the fresher draft of air. Here the Rajah was waiting, Josie beside him, dinning out questions.

"It's all a ruddy smoulder back there," the Padre said. "They'll not be able to follow for a time."

The reverberations from exploding grenades and ammunition lifted a constant din along the passage. No, there was no fear of the Japs following until that hell-hole had burned out and cooled off a bit. Burton gulped water; the bucket was here, with ropes, and Josie had hauled up afresh from the chasm.

"How's everything in the big chamber?" the Padre asked her.

"All right," she rejoined. "The baby's keeping Lady Bess quiet. The Rajah and his wounded man, the four women—that's all. Where is it going to end?"

"Where d'you expect?" shot out Cocky Bolt. "All they have to do is follow along this passage with the firebug and—bam! Like that. It's quick. This time, Lejeune never knew what hit him."

Burton shivered. "Well, we'd better dispose of this bridgework," he said. "Then we'll have a chance to hit back when the hole stops them. Those portable flame-throwers give out of fuel pretty quick. Can't last forever."

"That's an idea, Yank!" cried Josie. She had a flashlight, and snapped its ray at the flimsy bridge. "Come along, everyone!"

At the edge of the gulf, the air was pure and sweet, bringing instant relief to fume-parched gullets. Only two at a time could get to work on the bridge, however. Burton, with his hurt, was ruled out. The Padre and Cocky fell to the job, but the passage of weight had wedged the tree-trunks into the rocks.

"Come here and catch hold, Tom," exclaimed Cocky. "I'll go across and work from that side—I can always jump back."

He started across. Josie, watching, directed him with the light.

"That hole doesn't go straight down," she said. "Seems to be a big ledge sticking out, down there. Can't see it, but could feel it with the bucket on the rope."

"It's what's up here we're worrying about," returned Cocky, from the other side. "Lean on it, boys!"

Burton, idle, lit a cigarette and looked on. The Padre and Hunter, powerful of backs, tugged at this end of the bridge, while Cocky Bolt stooped and strained at the other end. The Padre grunted.

"Give us the light here, Josie. Can't see what's holding it—"

She complied. They stooped, heaved to the task. With grinding squeak of wood on stone, the bridge suddenly came away—so suddenly that the two men staggered wildly and clutched at each other. The timbers, with rasp and crash, plunged into the gulf . . . but there, on the opposite edge . . .

Burton saw it clearly in the reflected light. He saw Cocky upright, arms outflung, a look of supreme horror in his face, striving to regain balance and failing. Failing, and pitching forward and out . . . gone . . .

It was incredible; one could not believe it. The light flashed off. Josie's quick, sharp scream rent the darkness. The light came on again; the Padre was holding it. Josie was leaning against the wall, her hands over her face. Burton felt the cigarette burn his fingers. He dropped it, gained his feet, joined the others there at the brink.

They stood staring at one another, then down. Josie crept forward; her hand caught Burton's arm. A gasp escaped her.

"It can't—he couldn't—oh, look, look! Is he alive?"

The Padre lay down and held his light far over the edge. The batteries were weak; little was revealed. Burton thought he discerned a shadowy something down there as though the bridge had caught somewhere and lodged. Josie called.

"Cocky! Cocky! Can you hear me, Cocky?"

THEY froze, as echoes resounded. The explosions in the entrance cave had ceased. The echoes quieted. Then they heard it, all of them, not too faintly.

"Josie! Good luck, girl—good luck—"

That was all. Nothing else. No other reply to repeated calls.

"He's there!" Josie was on her feet, breath coming fast. "The ledge—I told you there was one—now you believe me? I'm the lightest. I'll go—plenty of ropes."

"All right." Hunter, phlegmatic, efficient,

accepted the situation. He reached out and caught the ropes lying by the bucket. "Good manila. Your foot in a loop—yes. Easy with that light, Padre. I don't need it. We may want it later."

The Padre switched it off. The darkness was comforting and kind. Burton's arm went about the girl's shoulders; she clung to him, mastering the quick sobs that shook her.

"I'm making some knots. May need 'em," said Hunter. His matter-of-fact manner calmed them and eased the ghastly moment. Everything else was forgotten.

"All right, Padre, let's have it," said Hunter coolly. The light flashed on. "Foot in the bight, Josie; keep your leg stiff. Fend off with one hand, keep hold with the other. Give her the light, Padre."

They obeyed him without question. Burton and the Padre were holding the manila line. Josie sat on the brink, clung to it, was swung and lowered away. While they paid out, Hunter lay on his stomach, watching the light below.

"Everything okay," he said. "There's the blasted bridge; stuck, sure enough. And looks like a big ledge down there. Yeah. I can see Cocky—looks like him, anyhow. Might be. Now she's blocking everything."

"How deep?" Burton demanded.

"Thirty-odd feet, I'd say. Water off at the side, deeper down."

"Hold it!" lifted Josie's voice. "Easy, now! Okay here."

After a moment the rope swung free. Burton glanced about, could see nothing, but felt at one side for a rocky projection he had previously noted.

"What you up to?" Hunter asked.

"Making the line fast here."

"Good idea. Lemme at it. I'm good with a rope." Hunter called down. "Josie! Don't let loose of that line. Keep the bight over your arm."

She made no answer. The three men above, in darkness, waited. Looking down, Burton could make out nothing in the light ray; the figure of Josie concealed it from sight.

They needed to ask no questions, however. A sound of convulsive sobbing came up from the depths, telling its own story. Burton picked up his fallen cigarette, still burning, and puffed at it.

"Guess that finished him," said Hunter. "Say a prayer, Padre."

"Say one yourself and don't depend on others," the Padre replied quietly.

"I didn't like him, but he proved up all right," Hunter responded. "All right. Take care of him, God; that's the best I can say."

The silence was awkward. The sobs below were mastered. Presently the voice of Josie lifted to them.

"Can you hear me, up there?"

"Sure thing," Burton answered. "What about Cocky?"

"He—he won't be coming," she replied. "You come down here. You and Tom."

Hunter grunted. "Not likely," he said under his breath. "No sense in dragging him up here to bury him. Let him be where he is. Eh, Burton?"

"That makes sense," rejoined Burton. He called down. "No use, Josie. Better let him be. Catch hold and we'll pull you up."

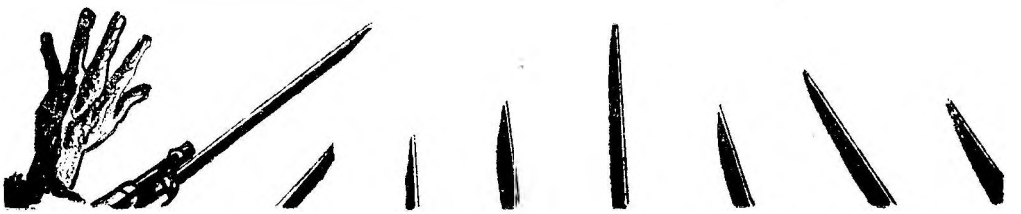
"No, no! It's not that—not for him. He's gone." Her voice broke. "Oh, come down, come down! Stop the talk!"

"Now she's gone wacky, too," commented Hunter disgustedly. "Well, she's a good kid. I'll humor her. I'm a monkey on a rope anyhow."

"Are you going down?" the Padre demanded.

"Yep. The line's fast, good and solid. I'll go down hand over hand. Wait till I get rid of these grenades." Hunter lifted his voice. "Okay, Josie, hold everything."

He was grumbling to himself, as he laid aside equipment. What grenades they had rescued were laid all together beside the rifles and bucket and pile of rope. Burton



fumbled about for the line that had been made fast, but Hunter repeated that it was solidly held, and so it was.

"No sense to it," Burton said half angrily. "It isn't as though we could do Cocky any good."

"What's the differ whether we go out down there or up in the cave?" Hunter grunted. "But she has some reason, maybe. Always humor a woman, son. You never lose by it and you'll maybe win. See you later. Watch that the rope don't chafe at the rim of the rock, that's all. I'm off."

He swung off, evidently; it was impossible to see him. After a moment he called down to Josie. He was making it all right. Hunter looked down from the brink and saw the feeble ray of the flashlight evidently directing him. The Padre came up alongside.

"This is all very strange, Burton," came his worried voice. "That flame-thrower—a horrible thing! Can they reach here with it?"

"If they can get it into action, yes. Those portable firebugs have a range of sixty yards. But there are a couple of bends in the passage, remember, before they can reach this hole in the ground, and they won't be knowing what to expect or look for. Hello! He's down okay."

HUNTER'S weight was off the line, but he was holding the end or had made it fast down below, obviously. Nothing happened. Nothing was heard.

"Afternoon must be getting along," observed Burton. "Have a cigarette?"

"Thanks, yes."

A match scratched. The flame lit up the hurt, savagely determined features of the Padre as he bent to the light.

"Do you know," he began, "it seems to me—"

He was cut short by the ringing voice of Hunter from the depths.

"Ahoy, Burton! Padre!"

"Yes?" responded Burton.

"Come on down here!" The voice of Hunter had a new and exultant note. "No palaver, but come along down, both of you, and fast about it!"

"Okay," rejoined Burton in astonishment. "Something's up, Padre. He means it."

"I couldn't climb down that rope. It's impossible," said the other.

"You could go down like Josie did. I could lower you. Evidently there's some good reason for it."

"Well, all right, then. Ahoy, Hunter! We'll pull up the line. Cast it off."

Hunter made assent. Burton hauled in on the stout line, letting it coil beside him as it came in. The knotted bight arrived.

But as it did so, a cry came pealing along the passage—a shout so savage, so wild and shrill with ferocity that it chilled the blood. "Allah!" it cried. "Allah!"

"The Rajah!" gasped out the Padre. "In the chamber at the end, Burton — something's wrong—I'll go see—"

He was gone, with scramble of boots. A shot came echoing down the passage, then another wild yell to Allah—then more yells and shots all together. A woman's scream rang out.

The Japs were in that end chamber, no doubt of it.

Burton dropped the rope. He had his pistol, and fumbled for a rifle, found a grenade instead, caught it up and was after the Padre on the instant. A furious curse escaped him —to come at such a moment! But Josie and Hunter were out of it, down there. The main thing was to reach the chamber of the petrified trees and give help. . . .

It was sorely needed, by the bedlam of screams and yells and shots rocketing along the passage. Burton, running, collided with the wall, stumbled, cursed again, found his way and hurried on at speed. Light showed ahead. The level rays of the westering sun were striking into that vaulted chamber.

He burst in upon a scene so frightful that the sheer horror of it halted him like a blow. It seemed impossible that so much could have happened so rapidly. The Rajah, his kris dartling like a snake, was fighting with three Jap bayonet-men; his Malay lay dead at his feet. Other Japs were embroiled with the women, whose knives were waging a losing fight against bayonets. Lady Bess, tall and gaunt, had a pistol in hand and blood was spurting over her parachute-drapery, as the Padre leaped to her assistance. A dead Jap lay at the entrance, his body blocking the efforts of others to get in.

"Allah! Allah!" The little Rajah skewered one Jap with his kris. A rifle exploded at his very chest; the kris drove into another. "Allah!"

He waved his kris exultantly as he died, and Burton pistoled the Jap who had killed him.

It was all a welter of blood and tumult. The Padre was down—no, up again—the brown women and the Japs were going down together. Burton shot one after another of those vicious little shapes; it was like killing rats. But there was no mercy, no quarter asked or given. A scurry at the entrance, a soldier crawling in. Burton darted over, gave him the final bullet, saw a group outside crowding for entrance.

He pulled the pin from his grenade and let it roll gently out among them, and then jumped aside. The explosion, almost within the entrance, was terrific. Dust belched into the chamber; the sunlight died away as a rush of stone and rubble came down outside, nearly closing off the entrance.

A bad dream, all of it—horrible and unreal—falling into silence here. Silence, except for a groan or two, a gasp of dying breath.

Burton looked around him, dropped the empty pistol. Bullet-pierced, Rajah Ali coughed, said something in Malay, and his head fell forward; the kris escaped from his fingers, its golden crooked haft dully gleaming. The women, dying or dead—Lady Bess lying on her face, peaceful now.

Then from it all rose a tall figure. The Padre stood up, wiped blood from his eyes, and held up something. It was the baby—Rajah Ali's son.

"Burton!" he croaked, his eyes wide with horror. "Out—get out of here—"

The women . . . that was the worst of it. The women, fighting to the death. . . . A Jap came up on one elbow, grasping at a weapon. Burton kicked him in the face and he fell back and lay still.

"Right." Burton woke up to reality. "Let's go. Anywhere, out of here—back down the passage. They're stopped for a bit, outside. Come along. What you doing with that kid?"

"What do you expect me to do—leave him here?" gulped the Padre.

"Are you hurt?"

"No. Bump on the head, that's all. It's horrible . . . horrible. . . ."

Burton led out of the drifting reek of dust and blood and fumes. He was unable to act, to think; nothing mattered any more. There was no place to head for, no place to go, except into the chasm where Josie and Hunter still remained. No refuge there; impossible to hide. It was grotesque, all of a piece with the savagely useless plans they had made.

The cool darkness of the passage was grateful. Burton stumbled on in the lead, the Padre following somewhere behind. There was an angle, before coming to the big split in the rock. As he approached this angle, feeling his way carefully, Burton heard a murmurous echo of sound. He could not account for it; from somewhere ahead, evidently. Sound, like the shuffle of feet, the murmur of low voices, all re-echoed a thousandfold from the cavern.

He came to the angle, some thirty feet from the chasm. He rounded it. With a little catch of his breath, he came to abrupt halt.

The Japs had come through from the cave entrance.

XX

UPON the far side of the chasm appeared the darting ray of a flashlight. Like a stabbing finger, it swept here and there, disclosed soldier forms, and came to rest on the brink of the empty gulf. Japanese voices chattered. The enemy were cautious, as well they might be. The finger of light followed the broken line of rock, searching out in vain some way of crossing the rift.

As the Padre came up with him, Burton reached back, caught the other's arm, and spoke under his breath.

"Wait here—don't budge! Stay covered. If I can make it, then come ahead to the ropes. . . ."

Like the stab of that flashlight, his brain leaped at the possibilities. In another moment or two that light would be playing across the gulf, searching out this side, exploring everything. He had a matter of seconds in which to act—win or lose!

Even as he spoke, he was gliding away, slipping forward at a run, making for the gulf and the grenades there at the side. The Japs could not hear his movements, for the air was filled with the murmurous echoes of their own voices. From Hunter and Josie, below, came no sound. They had certainly caught some inkling of that fight in the far

chamber and now would be waiting, waiting. . . .

The light-beam darted this way, struck into the gulf, held there. Burton dropped flat and edged forward. He was at the grenades. He was beside them; he snatched two. The beam of light flickered forward and touched him. The pin was out of the first. A yell of surprise broke from the Japs.

He hurled the pineapple, yanked the pin from the second. A rifle cracked. The second grenade was in air. Another rifle, another—rock splinters flew around him, the bullets ricochetted and screamed . . . he ducked and hid his face. . . .

The double blast came almost as one. He was flattened by it; the concussion hammered him against the rock. Screams pierced it. The Japs, crowded in the passage across the way, had no chance of escape. Every living thing there was searched out by the fragments of death.

A silence followed—an appalling silence, where nothing lived.

But upon this silence crept something terrible; a low hissing that swelled into a rushing breath. Burton lifted his head and looked. Light flooded the space opposite. Among the dead lay a man with heavy pack on his shoulders, a tube still in his dead hands. And this tube was vomiting a tongue of fire—a flame-thrower, a firebug!

As Burton stared, the tongue of flame increased, stretched out, lapped at bodies and rock. The concussion had set it off, or the convulsive grip of the dying man. But the tongue of fire was heading backward, back toward the cave entrance.

The Padre came with a rush. The baby in his arms was squalling with fright of the explosion. Burton leaped up and seized the rope, and held the bight at the edge of the gulf.

"Go down like Josie did!" he ordered. "Step in. Hold on with one hand, hang on to the kid with the other—go at it, go at it! Quick!"

The Padre, desperately trying to obey, almost went off the edge in his haste, but managed to make it somehow. He was nearly beside himself, mortally terrified and yet forcing himself to the task. He was over the edge, going down. Burton leaned back on the rope, got his feet braced in a crevice of the rock, and lowered away. The Padre's head disappeared.

THE lurid light increased, the hissing roar mounted. Burton, to his horror, saw that the tube of the firebug was slowly moving, as a hose held by no hand moves under the pressure of water. But this was liquid death. The tube swung, as though even in death those Japanese hands were aiming it. It swung — then caught and held against a body.

The stench of scorching flesh hung on the air. A sea of liquid fire played about those piled bodies across the way. And Burton paid out the line, hand over hand, thankful now for the knots that Hunter had tied. Man and baby hung upon his strength alone, but his gaze remained gripped to the horror opposite. If that devilish thing swung a little farther, its vomiting blaze would reach across to him. . . .

A shout from below, a shout in Hunter's voice, wakened him. The weight went off the line. And as it did so, he saw the hissing firebug jerk and begin to move again.

A spasm of panic struck into his brain. How he got over the edge, Burton never knew, but he did it. He was over, he got his feet about the line, he let himself down. The hissing roar leaped as though to catch him. His hands slipped, burned, then caught on a knot. Bits of molten flame struck around him like stars, falling past him. Another instant and the rope would be caught and melted in that tongue of fire—it was caught already—he felt a strand snap above him. He let himself down frantically. Another strand snapped . . . the last one held an instant . . . then the rope severed and he plumped down.

As he did so, hands caught hold of him and he fell on a rocky surface and lay there panting. And overhead, the roaring flame fell silent, went dead—its fuel was spent.

"Everything's all right, Yank! The voice of Josie reached into him, roused him to life. She was holding his head in her lap. "Hurt? Answer me, answer me!"

"No. I'm okay, Bright Eyes," he muttered, and managed to sit up. "Scared, that's all. Scared stiff. Gosh! That was a close call."

"All right, are you?" Hunter struck in, his cool efficiency a breath of vigor. He caught Burton's arm and helped him up.

"Come on, we've got to get into action!"

"Don't be a fool. What's the use?" Burton found footing, uncertainly; his knees were weak, his nerves were shattered. "We're stuck, down here. We can't do anything."

A vibrant, exultant laugh burst from Hunter.

"Don't you believe it! Look what Josie found—look!"

Hunter twisted him around. He blinked. Josie's light was playing about the Padre and the baby, who had fallen silent. Hunter lifted a hand and pointed. Then Burton saw it, and after an instant realized what it must be.

"Daylight! A chink of daylight!"

"More than a chink," said Hunter cheerfully. "More than a chink, you bet! We went and looked. It's quite a ways—clear to the other side of this hill, looks like—but we can get out there."

Jaded and forgotten hopes revived. The urge to live, to catch at any slim straw of life, is the last thing to die in the human heart. Burton looked around. They were standing on a wide ledge of rock; the light-ray showed that it became the floor of the rift, off toward the chink of distant light.

Here at one side the body of Cocky Bolt lay huddled. Josie had taken the baby from the Padre. Hunter was in motion. The light guided them. Here in the bowels of the earth, the world and its horrors were all shut away; here was silence, cleanness, sanity. Burton came back to himself. Josie held a hand to him, smiling, and he caught hold, and of a sudden everything was different. This was reality; the rest just a bad dream ended. There was still a chance for life.

Hunter and the Padre were in the lead. The big rift narrowed overhead. It narrowed in front, but the chink of daylight grew wider and stronger. An opening indeed, though a small one.

"Solid rock," Hunter said. "We can't enlarge it. Have to squeeze, and it'll be tough on the hide. Lucky we're thin guys."

"Yes, but a woman's thick where you're thin," said Josie, and laughed. A very miracle, that laugh; Burton had forgotten that such a thing existed as laughter. He looked at her in wonder, and her fingers tightened on his in a clench that was a caress.

They stumbled along with bare shoulder-room between the walls, now straight up. Josie was sent ahead, the Padre taking the baby, with orders to go slow and see what lay outside. The hole was low; she had to go into it head first, arms outstretched ahead.

"You boys will have to pull in your belts when you hit this," she flung back at them. "Ouch! It's bad. I'm stuck—no, I'll get through. Don't push me. Want to take a look."

They waited. After a moment she made a report.

"Okay. All quiet. Seems to be the other side of the hill, close to the lake, but I can't see the water from here. Before I go on through, better make up your minds if you want to tackle it now or wait till night."

Hunter, Burton, the Padre, looked at one another mutely. The Padre spoke.

"Either there's a God or there isn't. Either Cocky died to show us this way out, or he didn't. Either a Divine hand is leading us—or it's not. I say, play the game!"

"Bully for you," said Hunter. "Push the luck while it lasts. Burton?"

"Okay," said Burton, and stooped to catch hold of Josie's legs. "Here goes, Bright Eyes! Wriggle ahead!"

She obeyed. She moved, got on by inches.

"Gosh!" A gasp of dismay escaped her. "That did it—watch out for my sarong, back there—"

Burton shoved. She went on, leaving the sarong to gather about her feet. Burton pushed it on after her. Presently her voice came back.

"All right here. Send out the baby."

THE Padre was ready, stripped to the waist. He rolled the baby in his coat and shoved the bundle ahead of him with his rifle, gun-butt against bundle-butt, and went at the hole himself. It was tough work. He puffed and grunted, left hair and hide on the rocks, but got through.

"You next, Tom," said Burton. "You'll need shoving. I won't."

Hunter tackled it. Their only weapon, a rifle, was outside now. He damned the rock with hearty oaths and stuck; the Padre, outside, caught his hands and pulled, Burton shoved, and upon a mighty effort Hunter was through. Then came Burton's turn—a tight squeeze, but nothing worse. Hunter jerked him out into daylight and he was in the open.

The long day was nearly ended, the sun was lowering. Josie's white torso was reddened and scraped and bloodied by the rocks; Burton stripped off his shirt and gave it to her, for the sarong was ripped and shredded beyond use.

"The lake's just around this rock shoulder," said Hunter confidently. "Must be right close, too."

"Then let's go," said the Padre. "But take it slowly, now! No telling about Japs. Take it easy—"

"Easy be damned!" cried out Burton. "Listen! What's that?"

A droning, humming vibrance grew upon them. With a yell, Burton leaped into life. The others followed him.

They scrambled over the rocky, thorn-clad shoulder of the hill. There before them the lake was outspread in the sunset light, the shores empty, not three hundred yards distant. And hovering, dipping, circling, a huge gray shape that drew another yell from Burton. A transport, an amphibian, ready to descend like a bird on the water!

Burton caught Josie's hand, she held the baby aloft, they ran. All of them ran for the water. Hunter vented a sudden oath, and pointed. Off to the right, but a half-mile away, showed a group of Japs, also running.

"Into the water!" panted Burton. "They can't interfere—the pilot will see us all—trust him—"

See them, yes . . . on that empty shore they could be seen all too easily. Burton yelped for the baby, as they reached the shallows. Josie refused; she was all right.

They were into the water, splashing through the shallows; safety lay out afar. The transport was circling to come down. Past the shallows, they slid into deeper water and struck out . . . but another, angrier roar came out of the skies.

Only the screeching dive of the Zero betrayed its presence. It came down and down, bullets splashed the water around. Josie's voice sounded in wild alarm. Then the Zero leveled off and sought its prey, a glistening streak on the trail of its tracer fire. It was on the tail of the transport, then pulled up in sudden frenzied bank—too late! The amphibian was no docile victim, a tail gun opened up point-blank, spurting fire. The Zero mounted, stricken belly gushing smoke, pitched slantwise and away in a burst of mantling flame.

Somewhere along the shoreline came down the Zero, with a concussion that shook the water—a dead duck before she struck and became a huge smoke-bomb on the rocks.

The transport settled, slashed the surface with its pontoons, and taxied around for the swimmers.

The sun was down. The swift tropic twilight was gathering upon the jungled lands below, as the transport fled across the sky.

"All right-o now, Yank," said Josie.

Burton pressed her hand. His mind turned back for a moment to those who remained behind—Sir Anthony, the Rajah, Lady Bess, all who stayed in the Valley of Peace.

"Right-o, Bright Eye," he rejoined. "There's a war still on, you know."

"We'll see it through," she answered. Hunter barged in on them.

"The kid?"

"He's asleep," said Josie. "Never turned a hair."

"And you two mooning!" Hunter grinned. "How about that kid, Padre? Bit off color, but no questions asked. Call it a bonus in advance for these two, what?"

"No," spoke up the Padre. "He'll be a Rajah some day; I'll assume that trust."

"Well, here's for a milk fund!" Hunter pressed a small package upon Burton. "Take it."

"What's this, Tom?"

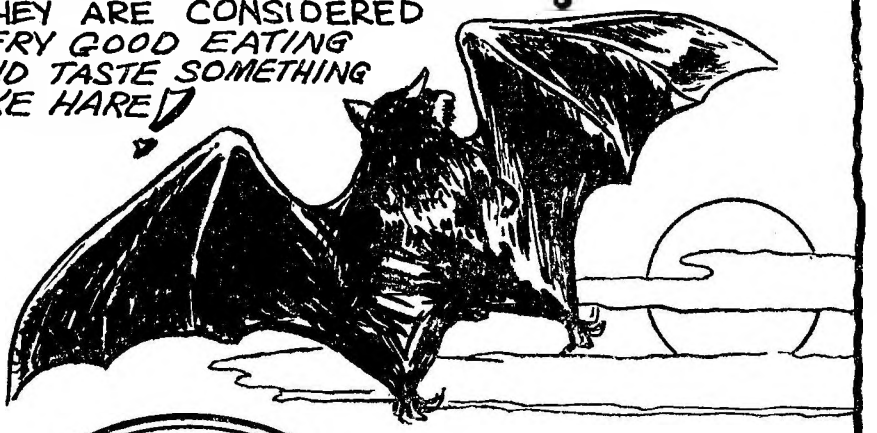
"Rubies. To hell with 'em! I'm going in for more fighting, when we land. Add 'em to what you got now. Wedding present, call it."

Josie was smiling, dimpling, laughing. Burton laughed too. They all broke into laughter together—they could laugh now.

THE END

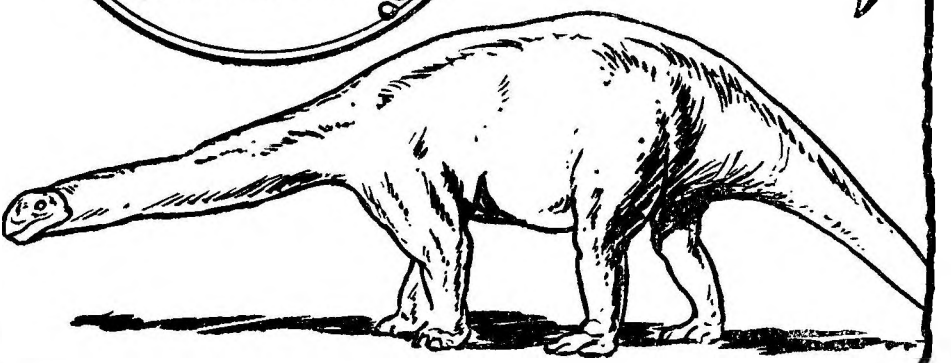
Curioddities By Weill

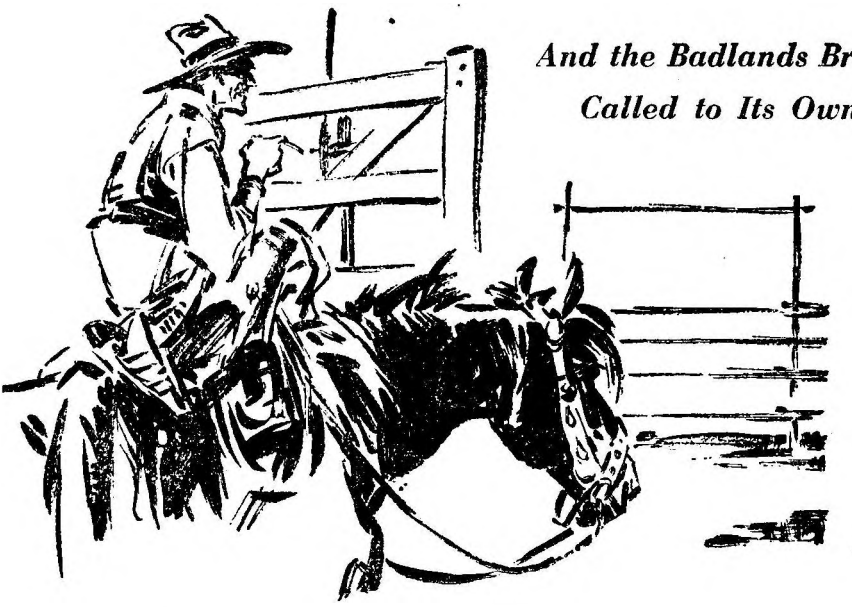
THE FLYING-FOX OR FOX BATS ARE THE LARGEST OF THE BATS, OFTEN MEASURING A FOOT IN LENGTH! THEY ARE CONSIDERED *VERY GOOD EATING* AND TASTE SOMETHING LIKE HARE!



BEER WAS FIRST BREWED BY THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS!

BRONTOSAURUS OR "THUNDER LIZARD" WAS THE LARGEST OF ALL DINOSAURS! HE REACHED A LENGTH OF ABOUT **70 FEET** AND WEIGHED AS MUCH AS *FOUR OR FIVE* ***ELEPHANTS***!





And the Badlands Breed Called to Its Own

BADLANDS BREED

By HAPSBURG LIEBE

IF HE had a name other than Little Wingo, nobody seemed aware of it. In fact, nobody seemed to know anything about him except that he was of a wild badlands breed and that, his youth and slight build notwithstanding, he could be a real hellion when his fur was rubbed the wrong way. Many of those who had sought to take advantage of him because of his looks had paid through the nose, as the saying is, for the mistake.

Tall young cattleman Ben Vance rode to Round Rock this lazy afternoon for two reasons. His big Half Circle V outfit—known usually as the Cup and Saucer—needed a new blank ledger, and he honed for a *hablar* with the grizzled, easy-going and not always successful Sheriff Abner Henning. Vance was a little surprised to overtake his range boss, stocky Pete Ingle, in the edge of town. Ingle spoke quickly:

"Found myself outa Durham, Ben, and thought I'd ride in and get some. Didn't think you'd mind."

Vance did mind. Things were not going well on the Cup. But he said nothing.

They had just reined into the dusty main street when a shot crashed in the nearest saloon. There were shouts, a barked oath, the rattle of overturned chairs. The Round Rock sheriff and a pair of deputies tore across the street and vanished inside the building. Vance and Ingle, curious, spurred after the officers, dismounted and dropped reins and ran in.

The ruckus was over and patrons were coming from under tables. Near the bar, sheriff and deputies covered Little Wingo with their six-shooters. The slim youth stood quietly in his worn old clothing, and grinned a hard grin as he surrendered his .41 double-action hookbill gun, fastest gun of its day. An idea exploded as suddenly as a firecracker in the tall young cattleman's brain. He forced sympathy into his voice:

"What was the trouble, Wingo?"

Sheriff Henning said promptly, "Looks like he'd started shooting the place up, Ben. See the back-bar mirror there?"

Little Wingo's eyes, slitted now, snapped to Vance's face.

"I'm twenty-one year old, Mr. Vance, but I still like red sody pop. I ast for a bottle and drunk it before I learnt I didn't have

nothin' in my pocket but a hole. The barkeep didn't know me, and tried to throw me out, and I ear-branded him to teach him some manners, and the bullet went on to bust the big lookin'-glass there."

The owner of the saloon appeared. He was mad. "You pay me forty bucks for that mirror, fella, or to jail you go!"

Little Wingo turned pale under his deep badlands tan. He said, "You gimme a month's time, and I'll bring you the forty. Whatever I am or ain't, I pays my debts. Trust me"

"I sure don't. Pay me now, or—"

"Wait," Ben Vance cut in. The idea in his head had become a plan. "You, kid. I'll put up the money for you, and you can ride Cup range for me a month and square it. All right?"

The kid blinked. Kindliness was strange to him. Range Boss Pete Ingle at his employer's elbow muttered, "I'd have no truck with the wildcat young'un, Ben. You'll regret it if you do."

Ignoring that, Vance paid the forty dollars, and turned to the senior lawman. "I'll stand for Wingo, Ab. It's okay, Ab, isn't it?"

A big rancher, he was a power in the county. Ab Henning nodded and gave back the badland kid's .41 hookbill. Vance told Little Wingo to get his horse and be ready to ride, then went to the sheriff's office with the sheriff. There the cattleman began:

"Law dog, I've got a plan. As you know, I've missed cows for a month or so, and you've not been able to do anything about it, and I haven't, and Ingle—well, he hasn't either. The thieves are slick gents and no mistake. Occurred to me that if I had the wild kid on my side — you follow me, Sheriff, don't you?"

"Yes," Henning said. "Badlands folks have always been stock thieves, and Little Wingo would know their ways better than any of us. But you'll have to keep an eye on Wingo and Pete Ingle, Ben. Pete thrashed the kid's daddy once, and the kid is not the kind to forget. Say—you've not had your range boss long; you sure of him?"

"I know only that he can handle men and cows," answered Vance. "Why, Ab? You think—"

"Just wondered," the officer said. "If Pete Ingle happens to be the thief himself, and Wingo gets the goods on him, he'll do his best to kill the kid and shut him up; and Ingle is as good and quick a shot as Wingo is. Well, let me know if I can do anything, Ben."

Vance stepped out of the sheriff's office to find the badlands youth sitting a patchwork saddle on a lean paint pony, patiently waiting. Pete Ingle was nowhere to be seen. Little Wingo drawled, "If you're lookin' for your range boss, Mr. Vance, why, he warned me that it'd be better if I kep' clean away from your range, and then he got him some Durham and high-tailed."

"Thinks you're pretty scrappy, I guess," Vance said.

"Mebbe," Wingo said. "I sure thank you for keepin' me outa jail, Mister. I never been in no jail, and none o' my folks ever was, which it's been a sorta fambly pride, y'might say, none o' us ever seein' the inside of a jail."

The owner of the Half Circle V smiled. He bought a new blank ledger, stepped into his saddle and rode out of town with Little Wingo.

Vance's range took up the whole of a long, broad valley that was hemmed in on three sides by high and rugged hills. The ranch buildings stood in a grove of live-oaks near a creek. It was sundown now, and cowboys were drifting in. At sight of the newcomer they fell silent, swapping meaningful glances. Foreman Pete Ingle, in the bunkhouse doorway, glared his displeasure. Vance got out of his saddle and walked up to Ingle.

"Look, Pete. I'm still running the Cup. Don't forget that. Start anything with the kid and we part company. The same goes for the rest of you boys. Understand?"

Silence fell. Little Wingo broke it with words that had the brittle cold ring of granite.

"Mr. Vance, you don't think I'm scared o' any o' them jiggers, do you?"

Again silence, and again the wild kid broke it: "You, Pete. I know what you got in your craw. Well, you don't hafta be on-easy. I sure don't like you, but it ain't my style to do what you're afraid I'll do."

Ben Vance opened his mouth to call for a showdown then and there. He thought better of it. Quietly, he said, "Get off your pony, Wingo, and come with me. Don't

worry about the paint. It'll be looked after."

The slender youth stepped out of his old saddle, flung his rein down and followed to the ranchhouse, where Vance lived alone save for a rheumatic *viejo* cook. Vance left his new ledger on the living-room desk. A little later, the *viejo* announced supper. Wingo had the best meal of his life, and ate ravenously.

THEN in the living room the cattleman lighted a big, hanging oil lamp. The prospective new cowboy dropped into the desk-chair, idly turned the leaves of the blank ledger and seemed unable to understand why there was no printing, not even pictures. Half in mischief he picked up a pencil and had drawn the crude likeness of a shorthorn cow before Vance saw.

"What the hell, kid — don't spoil the paper like that!"

Little Wingo, nettled, narrowed his eyes and slammed the pencil to the desk. Vance regretted that he'd been hasty. He forced a grin and sat down.

"All right, cowboy," he said, "let's get started. I want to know what it is that Pete Ingle is afraid you'll tell. Don't mind taking me into your confidence, do you?"

The badlands kid stared at the toes of his rusty boots. He didn't answer. Vance continued:

"I kept you out of jail, you know. You say you pay your debts, whatever you are or are not, and I'm expecting you to pay this one. I'll put the cards on the table, as you might call it.

"In the last two months I've lost some eighty Hereford cows worth close to $100 each; and they keep going, a few at a time, with no sign as to where or how. I figured you could help me with the riddle, figured you to be smart. I'm thinking of keeping you on and on, at good wages. There'd be no more going hungry and ragged for you. People have looked down on you because you're from a badlands set. It would be different here. Will you help me, kid?"

Little Wingo looked upward slowly. So few had taken any manner of interest in him. Yet his lips barely moved to let out a single word.

"Mebbe."

The owner of the Cup held his temper with difficulty. He said, "Nobody's got as fine a chance to rob me as my own range boss. Is it Pete Ingle?"

Wingo flared, "How would I know, Mr. Vance?"

Plainly, that was an evasion. Wingo picked up the pencil and made a half-circle and a V on the crudely-drawn cow that spoiled page one of the new ledger. Ben Vance shrugged and pointed toward a door near the other end of the living room.

"You can go to bed in there when you feel like it. Think over what I said, and I'll see you in the morning. Put this big lamp out, will you? Good-night, kid."

Vance rose and went to his own bedroom. It had been a long day for him, and he was tired. He slept like a stone until day had broken, then sat up with the feeling that something, somehow, was wrong. Dressing quickly, he buckled on his gun-belt and hurried into the living room.

The door to the bedroom that Little Wing had occupied stood open. Little Wingo was gone. A moment later, Vance found that his new ledger, also, had vanished.

All but the first page, that is, the page on which the kid half in mischief had drawn a cow. Thinking that the youth might have left a message here, Vance took the torn-out sheet to a window for better light.

But there was no message. Or, was there? The penciled Half Circle V brand had been hidden by pencil marks that at first glance seemed meaningless. Vance studied them. Suddenly he muttered

"Imitation Indian brand, and it would cover just about any legitimate brand in the state! Was Wingo trying to let me know that this is what I'll find on my stolen cows —if I find 'em? Promised he wouldn't tell on Pete Ingle, and took this way out? He'd just naturally hate a blabbermouth. I'll see what Pete has to say about it!"

He hurried back to the bunkhouse. The boys were up and making ready for breakfast. Range Boss Ingle wasn't there, and nobody knew when or where he'd gone. Both Little Wingo's paint and Ingle's horse were gone too, of course.

"If Pete followed that kid to kill him—" Ben Vance said to himself, and ran to saddle his own horse.

The business of finding two particular sets of hoofprints, where there were so many other hoofprints, was a difficult business.

He began riding a circle around his ranch buildings, hoping against hope that he'd be able to pick up the trail. At sight of two small pieces of white paper lying on the ground, Vance drew rein. The paper was lined with black and red. It had been torn from his new ledger!

Then he saw other bits of ledger paper, and he made a first-rate guess. Little Wingo, unable to bring himself to the point of blabbing, had manufactured this unique trail to the eighty missing Herefords—trust any man of the badlands breed to know the destination of any stolen cows!

"The kid is paying his debt to me, after all," Vance growled to himself. "Pete sure will kill him, or he'll kill Pete, when and if Pete overtakes him. He was unlucky in not getting away without the range boss knowing."

The grass was wet with dew, the paper pieces were not, which meant that the trail was scarcely an hour old. Vance drove his heels into his horse's flanks. It was a good horse, and fresh, and it lined out like an arrow. Soon Vance found the two sets of hoofprints that he'd been looking for.

The string of white spots turned right at the foot of big hills, led on to where the Cup and Saucer range creek came out of the rock wilderness, and there ended. Ben Vance swore. His vanishing cows had left no sign because they'd been driven up this shallow, stony creek. He called himself a fool for not having thought of the trick.

After he had followed the stream for some miles in the hills, riding hard, he found the paper trail again. It lay southward through a labyrinth of crooked valleys and canyons. On sandy spots it was accompanied by the markings of many split hoofs and two sets of hoofs that were not split.

A couple of hours, and the hard-riding Vance was entering a steep-walled, grassy basin so well hidden that he had never guessed its existence. This was a rustlers' paradise or he just hadn't seen one. And there before him grazed his stolen Herefords, all of them wearing the very clever imitation "Indian" brand that covered his Half Circle V brand perfectly!

On some of the cows it was fairly healed over, on others it was new and almost raw. Vance rode through a narrow gap in the crude fence that blocked the basin entrance, turned a boulder and saw both Pete Ingle's horse and Little Wingo's pony standing over dropped reins less than two hundred yards off.

Of Ingle and the kid he saw nothing. He pulled rein and yelled, "Pete! Wingo!"

No response. Again he sent his voice echoing from one high, steep rock wall to another, angrily, this time. "It'll be too bad for you when I find you, if you don't answer me—and I'll certainly find you!"

"All right, Ben," his stocky range boss called to him from the shelter of a niche in the basin wall off leftward. "I just didn't want to give my hiding place away—Wingo has been gunnin' for me an hour or more, and I don't know where he is. Might see if you can spot him. I don't believe he'll shoot at you."

Vance remembered Sheriff Ab Henning's telling him that Ingle had once thrashed the kid's daddy. Vance rode along the edge of the rock both to right and to left of his foreman. Suddenly he bit down on an oath and jerked his mount to a halt.

On the ground there under a high ledge Little Wingo lay glaring and pale, with a leg broken.

"So you fell," the tall young cattleman said, and stepped to the grass. "Here, Pete, and hustle!"

He took charge of the kid's deadly .41 hookbill. Ingle ran up with his now holstered big six-shooter banging against his thick right leg. Vance narrowed an eye and threw at him, "Gunning for you, was he? Why did you follow him out here, Pete?"

"Well," straightforwardly said Ingle, "I figured he was up to somethin' when I spied him leavin' early like he did, and felt sure of it as I noticed him droppin' that trail of paper pieces. Yeah, I gunned for him, when I'd found that *he* was the cow-thief!"

Vance jerked his gaze back to the kid on the ground. The kid's grin was bleak. "Slick, Mr. Vance, wasn't it? But after you'd been so nice to me, why, I couldn't stummick it any longer, and so I had to give the cows back, but didn't aim to be caught—whatever I am or ain't, I pays my debts. All right, hang me if you want to. Get it over with!"

Ben Vance stepped into his saddle. "Hang, hell. I'm taking you to the doctor. You'll make the best cowboy on the range.

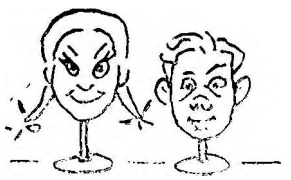
You, Pete. Lift him up here to me. He can't ride with that busted leg."

Ingle did it. Vance said, "Pete, why were you so set against the kid working for us?"

Ingle shrugged. "Well—he's from the cow-stealin' badlands, ain't he? I'm badlands breed too, and Little Wingo knew it! I'd lived this down, but—I was afraid Wingo'd tell you and spoil things for me. Now you can fire me if you like, Ben."

Knowing men had had much to do with Vance's making the Cup a big outfit. Again he furnished proof of the fact that he did know men.

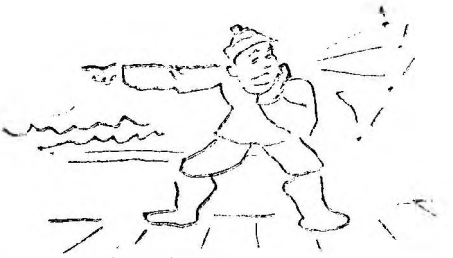
He said, "Fire a good range boss? Not me. You and the kid are going to be tight friends. Now let's ride."



Shorter Stories

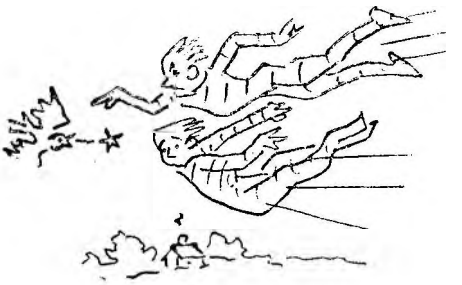
By Hannes and Ria

A WHALER cried, "Boys, thar she blows!"
And the others' glad shouting arose.
But I hate to relate
It was simply the mate
Who'd caught a bad cold in his nose.



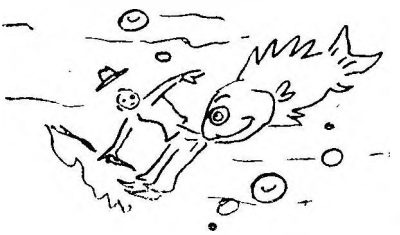
There once was a parachute jumper
Who grew plumper—and plumper—and plumper!
All this excess weight
Made him too-heavy freight
For a chute—but his fat served as bumper.

An aerialist on a trapeze
Was seized by a soul-shaking sneeze.
He was late on the pick-up,
For his partner would hiccup!
Which was going quite far for a wheeze.

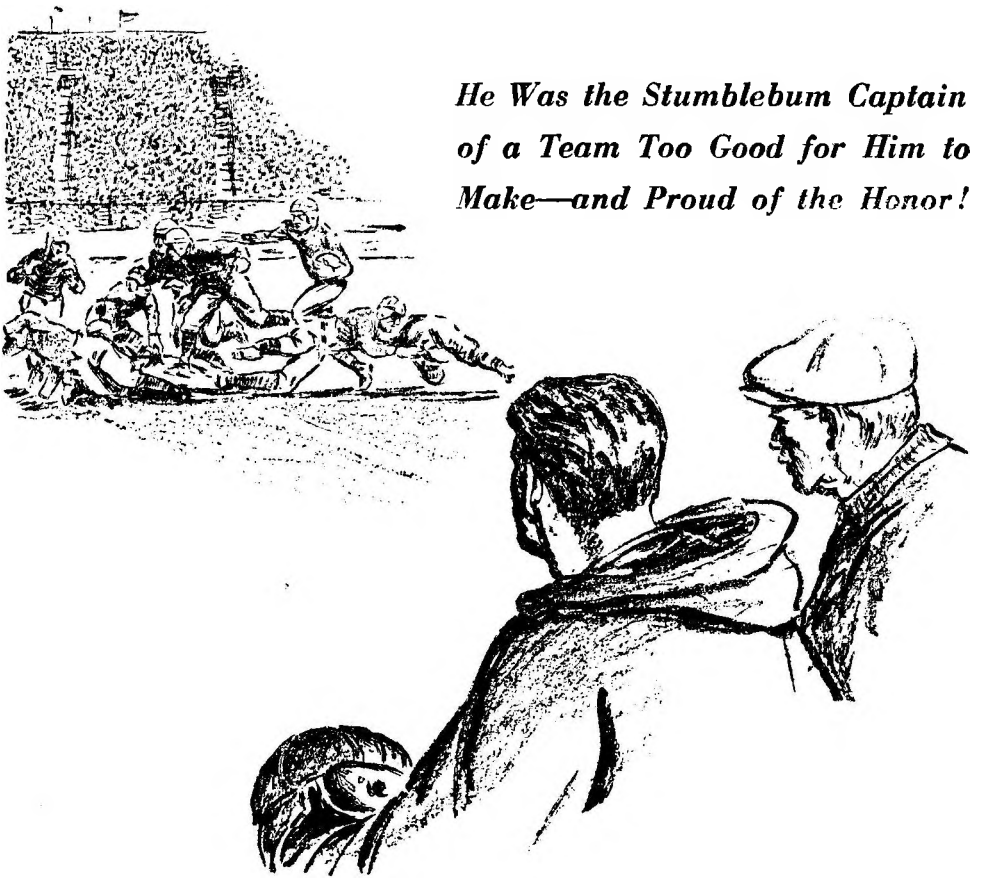


An Eskimo boy in the slush
Cried, "Mama, can I have some *mush?*"
The dogs dashed away
With the food-laden sleigh
Before Mama could admonish, "Hush!"

A sandhog, beneath the East River,
Felt the tunnel's walls buckle and shiver.
He yelled to his men,
Who replied, "Guess again,"
For the trouble was all with his liver!



A fisherman, wading a stream,
Moaned, "Night and day, it's my dream
To rout out a trout
Worth shouting about!"
Then one came right in on the beam.



He Was the Stumblebum Captain of a Team Too Good for Him to Make—and Proud of the Honor!

THE WAY OF THE MIGHTY

By ROY C. RAINEY

LIKE a huge gray serpent, the Corbin backfield came to life and poised to strike, just over the midfield marker.

Taut on the bench, young Eddie Cobb saw it happen, and his eyes were shining, through the sadness. The sadness that the Old Man's dream was paying off, at long last, and just about too late.

There were four minutes left in that first half, and the Greys were locked in a scoreless tie. And then Jim Slater had trotted on to the field, squinting a little quizzically at the sparse stands. The dour little signal caller had pulled them into the huddle, and what he said to them must have been potent, because they were fighting mad when they went into formation. Eddie felt the Old Man's hand on his shoulder, heard him say, through the yells, "This is it, son." And then the ball was snapped.

It was a simple reverse from a double wingback, with Slater taking the ball. He feinted long enough to pull the State tackle inside, gave him a hip and went around deep to his left, where Pat Sullivan was waiting. The big power back took the ball in full stride, booming right past and around the startled State end. The secondary came in, and Blimp Somerville put a massive running block on three men and they vanished across the sideline.

And then Pat was free, eating up the white lines with effortless ease.

He went across into coffin corner and touched the ball down, looking a little bored. Not a hand had touched him. It was that easy.

That was the way it started. In spite of the cold, Eddie Cobb was sweating under his windbreaker. After all, when a guy has waited for four long years to see a miracle, it's a little hard to take when it happens.

The Old Man sat down beside him on the bench. He was breathing heavily, with a kind of strangled pride in his eyes, trying to keep his voice calm.

The State tailback had just taken the kick-off, and a solid wall of gray jerseys was bulling him back to his own twenty.

"Yuh see, kid," the Old Man was saying, "It works. It always was there. Only this is the first time I had the manpower to ride it through."

Eddie was thinking: Yeah. Before you had nothing but eleven guys named Joe who would break their necks—and had—for Corbin, but they didn't know much about playing football. Now you got million bucks' worth of talent on the hoof, and none of them gives a damn. I wonder which is better, after all.

But that wasn't the kind of thing you would say to the Old Man. Or want to, even if you could. So he kept his lips tight against the bitterness, and watched that slaughter develop.

THAT was a hell of a backfield, those Navy transfers. They had little Sammy Levey, the Brooklyn Bomber who looked like a mild little clerk off the field and a rakish assassin once the whistle blew. They had Swede Rassmussen, the Wisconsin stonewall, to take care of the power stuff. And Slater, with Sullivan, could have made any All-American in the last decade, and knew it.

Take four of the best backs in college football and give them a line to back them up and you have pretty close to a dream team. And if that gray machine out there wasn't just about that, Eddie didn't see what could be.

It was pretty pathetic. The State team was big and willing, but they had never been up against the big time before. They had a kid named Joe Baldwin who had been all-conference fullback for two years, and the first time he tried to come around right end, Soup Train came in with Sammy Fry, ganging him into the sidelines. When the pile untangled young Baldwin was flat on his back, staring sightlessly up at the sky. They poured some water on the back of his neck and he got up. But the fight was gone from his eyes.

Young Baldwin tried to carry the ball again on the next play, and that was a mistake. The fearsome Train knifed in all alone, hitting him almost before the play started. The ball squirted out of his hands like a grapefruit, and the Swede took it in midair without breaking his stride. They brought him down on the six, and two plays later Sammy Levey went through a big hole over tackle and scored standing up. It was fourteen to nothing against the strongest team in the conference. And the kids had needed just four minutes to do it!

They went into the clubhouse. The Old Man was so excited he couldn't talk. They were poised and sure of themselves and a little bored with it all. Swede Rassmussen was saying, " . . . an' this tackle gave me the elbow the first play. So I could see he wanted to play rough an' I let him have it on that reverse. I hope he can eat tomorrow. He's gonna have a powerful sore belly."

Slater barked, "Nuts on the dirty stuff, wise guy. These tramps are too easy as it is."

The Old Man held up his hand and walked to the center of the room. His face was glowing, so that the tired lines were almost gone from his eyes. He said, "I—I had a lot of things to say, boys. I've never been able to see a team of mine ahead of State before. All I can say is—keep it up. And thanks—more than you will ever know."

They were a little embarrassed. Blimp Somerville said, "Shucks, mister, this ain't nothing. We can take this one with one hand tied behind our backs."

And then Jim Slater yawned, and his cold black eyes narrowed.

"And then we make two more touchdowns," Slater said, in his rasping dry drawl, "you send Eddie Cobb into the ball game. I guess, seein's he's captain, he better see the way his club can work."

Soup Train snickered openly. Eddie could feel the hot blood pulse in his neck.

The Old Man said, a little wearily, "It isn't easy for Eddie, I guess. If he had his

way, he'd be out there fighting for Corbin, sixty minutes of the time. He's done it for three years."

Jim Slater said, "You only won two games in those three years. According to what I hear. You better let us do it our way. We'll make out all right." And then the gun barked, and they went out on the field.

IT SEEMED funny, warming up in front of the bench. Eddie heard the yells from the stands, shouting his name, and a lump came up in his throat that nearly choked him.

It was late in the fourth quarter. It was forty-two to six, and that big gray steamroller was still piling it on. He was going into the ball game. And for the first time in his life he was frightened.

He had done it a hundred times before, on a score of cleat-scarred fields. The pictures of some of them were in his brain as he waited. There was the time at New Haven when he had limbered up under a dozen layers of adhesive, trying not to give the limp away, waiting to go in for that murderous last quarter against a Yale team that was thirty points ahead and still rolling. There was the slaughter at Colgate when he had played thirty minutes with a bad concussion and had to read the papers the next day to know he had been in there. There were the good games and the bad, and most of them had been bad. But they were a part of him, the magic fused ribbon of memories that had been his football life.

The Old Man said, "Give 'em hell, Eddie," and he went out on the field. The little Corbin band made a lot of noise, more than they had all day. It was as though they were trying to say, "It really doesn't matter, Eddie. This team is bigger than both of us. But we're with you all the way."

Jim Slater was stripping off his helmet. The signal caller's face was lean and drawn and there was a cleat cut over his eye, but he still had a lot of football in him. He said, "Take it off tackle, kid. We got that line softened up plenty."

They went into the huddle. Sammy Levey said plaintively, "If they'd only bat us around a little. This is kid stuff, for my money."

It must have been, Eddie was thinking, after that brand of football the Dodgers played. And Levey had played for them half a season under an assumed name.

"The old thirty-eight, through tackle," Eddie said. He tried to talk naturally, but there was a tremor in his voice, and Swede Rassmussen laughed, not unkindly.

"You just walk through there, sonny," the Swede said. "Any guy that can't score against these tramps is four-f in the head."

The pass came down there, leading him to the left, pointing the play. He started, a little too late, forgetting Blimp Somerville's sharpshooting.

And—the ball hit his fingertips, spun and caromed away. The State line was in there, knocking him to his feet. But as he fell he saw the Swede's rakehell dive, blasting two men out of the play, so that Levey could recover. But they had lost eight yards. The ball was on State's thirty. And there were only minutes left in the ball game.

He went back into the huddle again. The Greys were grinning tolerantly. Pat Sullivan said, "Jeepers, kid. You gotta get that ball before you can run with it. Remember?"

The Swede said ponderously, "Look. We like you, see? Now just unlax and hold onto that thing an' after a minute you can go back an' all your pals will cheer for you."

It was the same play. This time the nervousness was gone and he was ready. He took two steps to the right, cut in and lunged at that State wall, just off tackle.

And a surprising thing happened, something that he had never known before. He almost fell on his face, carried by that impetus. There was nothing to hit! There was an acre of open space, and he skidded through there, almost off balance, carried by the fury of his drive.

He fell over the last white marker and skidded on his nose, and it was good. But there was something missing too. And when he sat up he realized what it was. Not a State man was on his feet. That razor blocking had hewed them down like trees.

The Swede kicked the conversion, almost carelessly. And it split the uprights. The Greys were laughing. Levey said, "Save that go juice, pal. You may need it some day."

They had just time for the kickoff when the gun barked, ending the game. Fans were streaming out of the stands, trying to start a snake dance. A couple of drunks were fighting with the cops, trying to get at the

goal posts. It was touching and a little silly.

The Swede said, "Kid stuff!" and trotted down into the runway.

Eddie said, "Maybe it's kid stuff to you, mister. But those guys up there hadn't had a chance to cheer for three years. Now it's dumped right in their laps, and they don't know what to do with it."

And neither do I, he was thinking, a little fiercely.

Only the next six weeks would tell the answer.

THEY took on Dartmouth. The Big Green was three-deep with V-T talent. Watching them stream out of the runway, Eddie could feel that old familiar tightness grip his middle. They were tough and big and fast. The Greys looked small beside them. But Jim Slater was clowning around with Pat Sullivan just before the kickoff, as though it were a routine scrimmage against the scrubs.

Feeling a little foolish, Eddie said, "Okay, gang. This is the one we want. There's ten thousand guys up there counting on you to pull us through."

Blimp Somerville spat. He said, "Sonny, we'll do our stuff. But let's not have no rah-rah pep talks, huh? We kinda gave them up a long time ago."

Levey said, "Yeah. You go sit on that bench and after a while you can come in an' save the game, maybe. But I guess we'll have it in the bag by that time."

The Greys were grinning openly. They were not at all awed by the men in green. The last thing Eddie heard, as they trotted out there, was the Swede's massive rumble: " . . . An' this babe, she said she'd be in section twenty-eight, with a red hat. . . ."

It was a high, deep kickoff, going down to the shadow of the goal. Slater took it over his shoulder, waited for his interference and went down to the thirty before they pulled him down. They came out of the huddle, and on the first play from scrimmage Boots Callahan, the Green All-American wingman, faked the Swede out of position and brought Slater down from behind for a four-yard loss.

He got up, raging. And Eddie, without knowing why, knew that they would run that same play again. The Swede was rubbing his jaw, a little sheepishly, but the muscles of his leg were taut, waiting for the ball to be snapped.

It came down there, and this time Dartmouth backs were pouring through, alert to smash up the play. And the Swede hit them cunningly, blocking them completely out of the picture. Sammy Levey came way over from his wingback and his knifing dive cut Callahan's legs out from under him. And then Slater was running down the sideline, all alone. They brought him down on the twenty.

A little breathless, Eddie sat down. His eyes were wet, and for a minute he couldn't see very well. This was the real thing. All his life he had been trying to do it. And now it was here for him. This team would give no quarter to any outfit in the land. Only—he wished they cared.

Pat Sullivan faded back, bluffing a pass, waiting for the Green secondary to fan out. That line was so good that he had five seconds to loaf back of the scrimmage line. And then, lateralling to Levey, they went down to the five. Quite calmly, the Swede waded straight through the center of the line for a score on the next play. It had taken exactly forty-five seconds.

That was the way it started. They scored once in the second quarter, and three times in the third, within five minutes. Soup Train made two of his patented catches, and one of Levey's passes traveled fifty yards in the air. The Old Man sent in the second stringers then and Eddie led them to one more marker in the final quarter.

They came off the field. It was thirty-nine to nothing. It was the big news of the day, and they knew it. Corbin was a national power in the gridiron world. Whether they wanted it or not.

IT WAS one of those things. It was bound to happen some time. The way it did was too bad.

Eddie had just come out of a science class and was walking across the South Campus. There was a group of undergraduates in front of the Somers plaque and they were laughing loudly. The Swede and Jim Slater were in the front row.

The Somers plaque isn't much to look at. Just a bas-relief bronze tablet with the head of a man in a football helmet. A funny-looking guy, in the outsize gridiron regalia

of two decades ago. And under the face, the inscription:

"... James Pritchard Somers. 1890-1911."

And under it, alone and rather small, the single line:

Corbin 13, Tryon 12 . . . 1911.

They saw Eddie and the Swede said, "Hey cap, who's the whiskers?"

Eddie said gravely, "We don't make jokes about that man. He happens to be the only Corbin captain who ever led his team to a win over Tryon. We've been hoping to do it ever since."

Jim Slater said loudly, "Let us pray, pals. So he won a lousy football game for this dump. Maybe I oughta swoon or something."

Eddie said, "I guess you didn't get the point, chum. Jim Somers wasn't a good football player, perhaps. But he was captain of a Corbin team."

"Like you, huh?" Slater said, winking at the Swede.

"Like me," Eddie said doggedly, trying to keep the anger down. "Captain of a jerkwater school, trying to beat Tryon, beating his brains out against something that was bigger than he was. The night before the Tryon game, in 1911, Jim Somers was sicker than he knew. He had a cold so he couldn't breathe and a pain in his chest. But he lugged that ball sixty yards through the whole Tryon line in the last ten minutes of the game, and kicked the point after touchtown before he collapsed."

"Sucker," Levey said succinctly.

"Yeah, maybe he was," Eddie said, a little wearily. "He died of pneumonia two days later. But a lot of the boys didn't feel that way. Maybe we haven't had many heroes around here. But we sorta like to think of Jim Somers as one of them. We like to look at that empty space under his name and think of putting some more wins over Tryon down there, in his memory. And we don't like to see anybody laughing at him, or what he did."

There was an embarrassed silence.

Jim Slater said, "Okay. He was the nuts. And you have wonderful traditions and we uncouth intruders are very disrespectful, even if we win ball games for you. But—we had our traditions too. And our schools to cheer for. Just because the Navy has sent us here doesn't mean we're Corbin men. We'll win ball games for you, like I said. But don't expect us to like the setup. The war brought us here an' the war'll take us away again. Let's leave it that way."

They took on B. C. The Boston Irishmen had smart Sandy Semple back calling signals, and a sophomore transfer scatback named Pop Merullo. He was a gangling beanpole with loose floppy arms and oversize feet. He took Slater's kickoff on his own ten and staggered uncertainly under the ball, looking scared to death. The ball hit his chest and almost bounced free, and the uncertainty left him like a discarded cloak and something like magic went into his stride. The Swede was down there, and Merullo straight-armed him right into Sonny Fry, taking both of them out of the play. And then the Boston forward wall was cleaving straight down the center of the field, picking off interference, cutting down the tacklers with almost ridiculous ease.

It was one of those things. Soup Train had a clear shot at him on the thirty and missed him by a foot. The guy, for all his lumbering awkwardness, was surprisingly fast.

Blimp Somerville caught him from behind at midfield, stumbled and lost him. And then there was nobody down there but Jim Slater, waiting at the twenty.

CURSING, Eddie was on his feet, watching that lone slight figure make his play. The guy was all ice and whalebone. He was hemming Merullo into the sideline, trying to spill the play. But there were three interferers, and it was going to be too much. He took two of them out of the picture with a beautiful shoulder block, but Sandy Semple got through and brought him down. Pop went across the goalline, looking a little surprised.

They kicked the goal and it was seven to nothing. The stunned stands had hardly settled in their seats.

Somehow, out of a miracle, the Irishmen held that slim lead. The Greys, at first calm, were pouring everything they had at that lighter wall, trying to shake a man loose. But Semple and Merullo were all over the field. They were outweighed and outskilled, but they had something to fight for. A win over mighty Corbin, the surprise team of the East, would put them right up there in

the rankings. And they were fighting their heads off.

Once, late in the second quarter, the Greys shook Levey loose just past midfield, and the little man went down to the twenty before the raging Irish secondaries pulled him down. But on the next play the Swede fumbled and the gun barked before they saw the ball again.

They went into the clubhouse. The scrubs were dejected and worried. But Levey and the Swede were laughing loudly over some joke Soup Train had pulled. The Old Man said, a little pathetically, "I know you can do it, fellows. Win this one for me."

The saturnine Slater said grimly, "Can do, sir. As soon as these slobs decide to play football."

The Swede said, "What the hell! Keep your shirt on, gents. It's a long afternoon. We can knock them off any time we wanna get in the mood."

"We've got just thirty minutes to do it," Eddie reminded him, a little grimly.

The Swede blinked. His eyes, Eddie noted, were red, and there was a decided aura of stale beer around him. But the Swede with a hangover was better than any two other men they could find, and so he said nothing.

They went out there and the loyal little Corbin band was playing, "Hail, Conquering Corbin." It was fine stuff. They had been getting a lot of practice playing that thing, Eddie was thinking. Other years, they only could render it about once a season, when they happened to win a game.

Slater talked to them just before they took the field. The guy didn't give a damn about Corbin, but he was a born, driving leader. The Swede's face was an angry mottled red when Slater finished and his massive hands were clenched. He took the B. C. kickoff and half the enemy forward wall was in on him before he could get started. And then, out of some miracle, he shot straight through and over them. Sandy Semple had one arm around his neck and the Swede just carried him along with him, trying to shake him loose like a cat worrying a mouse. He ploughed straight down to the forty before the sheer weight of numbers pulled him to earth.

Beside Eddie, little Al Fraser breathed, "There goes a football player, kids!"

That was what all of them were, Eddie was thinking. A little lucky handful of big-league stuff, dumped unto a school because of a war. They would hold their own against the best, as long as they lasted, or cared. After that—

He didn't dare to think about that.

THEY went into the T formation, that fusion of power and deception that is almost powerless to stop when it clicks, and pathetic when it fails. Slater, the back in motion, took his three steps to the right as the ball was snapped. Levey took the pass from center, spun, faking a lateral, faded back and threw a bull's eye straight down the middle. Three Irishmen were ganged up on Soup Train, and the big guy jumped a foot higher than any normal man and stole it out of their fingertips. They pulled him down on the spot, but the play had gone for forty yards.

The Old Man said, "Eddie! Go in there and bring in that score."

Stunned, Eddie went out there. Slater looked up from the huddle, surprised. He said, "You got it a little wrong, chum. You come in later, remember? We got a ball game to win first."

"The boss's orders," Eddie grinned, and Slater went away, looking very gloomy. The Greys were not laughing any more. The Swede's chest was going up and down, and Levey was limping. They looked a little dubiously at Eddie. They needed Slater's fire more than any of them would admit.

It was a straight power play over tackle. Eddie took the ball and the entire right side of the Irish wall came up and hit him at once. The earth and the sky blotted out and he caromed off the back of his neck and lay there, gasping.

He climbed to his feet, a little dizzy from that terrific hammering, and looked at the sideline. He had lost four yards. Levey said, "Slater would never have called that play, pal. That line can dish it out with the best of 'em."

It was the truth. It was suicide to send a light man into that raging wall and he should have known it. He sent the Swede through the same spot, on a spinner play, and the big man picked up five yards. It was third and nine. On a hunch, Eddie decided to try a spot pass. The Irish secondaries were wide, protecting the end zone, and

there was plenty of space just in back of the scrimmage line. Soup Train ghosted through, stopped and the ball came in just over his shoulder. It was a first down on the three.

Just what perverse streak made Eddie decide to carry the ball over, he never knew. It was partly the knowledge that somehow he had to prove himself to these sneering giants. But it went deeper than that. He had such a short time to do something, and this was one of those moments. When he gave the signal, Pat Sullivan grimaced, but they didn't say anything. The pass came in there, and he dove for that grudgingly opening hole, just over left tackle. A massive club came out of nowhere and hit him over the eye, and that was the last he knew.

The lights came on again, painfully and slow. He sat up, and a voice said, "He's all right now."

He was, he discovered, in the dressing room. The kids were peeling off their monkey suits. They looked very hot and very tired. The Old Man said, "It's all right, Eddie. After you fumbled, we lost the ball and it looked bad for a while. But that Slater just ran through the whole team in the last two minutes for the score that pulled us through."

Slater sauntered over. He was impassive and poker-faced, but there was a kind of challenge in his eyes. He said, "You see how it is, pal. It just comes down to fundamentals. You got a good club here, maybe a great one. Let 'em alone and they'll win for you. But—you're not big enough to do it for them."

Eddie grinned ruefully. You had to like the guy. He was the berries and he knew it, but he could back up everything he said.

"That's good enough for me," he said. "There's a guy named Eddie Cobb whose gonna play a lot of football the rest of this season. But it'll be with the scrubs, starting Monday."

IT WAS good to feel the turf under his feet again, going into a game with somebody he knew. They were only the lowly scrubs. They had Tub Rand, last year's first-string center, and Daffy Loeser, a good cunning back without brains. But the rest of them were strictly from hunger. Daffy said, "Hey, guys, we got a real football player. Let's give them ringers a real battle, for a change!"

They were scrimmaging the varsity. Eddie took the opening kickoff. He had intended to go down the sideline, but the Swede sailed ponderously down there, scattering the lighter scrub line like chaff, and brought him down before he could get started. It had been a crushing tackle, but Eddie bounced to his feet, liking the feel of it, somewhat to his surprise. This was what he had been used to, all the years he had played for Corbin. To be in there against a better team, fighting to keep your brains from being unscrambled. The boys were glad to have him with them. Fat said, "I shoulda been blocking in there, cap. But that Swede guy just won't stop when you hit him."

"He will," Eddie said cheerfully. "Gimme the ball around end. We'll see what makes these supermen tick."

The sun was good and he had a lot of running due him. He took the pass from center and it was low and too fast, so that he had to juggle it a second. Sonny Fry knifed through and Fat put an awkward, but effective block on him, taking him out of the play. Soup Train's big hand raked the back of his jersey and tore free. And then he was into the secondary, waiting for Levey and Slater to make their play.

They were coming in from opposite sides, and instinctively he knew that Levey would hit high and Slater low, for that was their way. He had seen them break a big Dartmouth climax runner almost in half the same way. He had an answer to it, and he wanted to see if it would work. Without slackening pace, he swerved toward Slater and saw him stop, waiting for Levey to get there, and then, without breaking his stride, he sidestepped, straight-arming the Brooklyn man straight into that diving figure. There was a muffled *thop* of impact and a cleat went past his face, as he reversed his field, going down the opposite sideline, in the clear.

He touched the ball down, grinning. And then the grin whipped away. Something was funny back there. There wasn't any noise. He looked back and both teams were huddled around a writhing figure on the ground. It was Jim Slater. His right leg horribly askew.

Swede Rassmussen said, "There goes our ball club!"

Jim Slater's lips were tight with shock, but he managed a shaky grin. He said, "You ran around my end, kid. Nobody's—done that in three years. You—you wanna get another inscription on that plaque, you'll hafta do it. I—I guess I won't be around...."

They carried him off the field.

They went into the locker room. The Old Man called off work for the day. They were shaken and scared, for all their impassiveness.

They hadn't liked the acid-tongued boy, but he had driven them to the heights, and they knew it. Without him, they were just a motley array of talent on the hoof.

Swede came up to Eddie in the shower room. The big guy's eyes were harried.

"It was one of those things," he said awkwardly. "Don't let it get you."

Eddie shrugged hopelessly.

"What can I say?" he sighed. "I've been a hell of a captain. I can't make my own team. And then I wreck it all alone. And with Tryon comin' up Saturday—"

The Swede said, "That's what I meant, kid. Like you said, you broke a good ball club to pieces this afternoon. There's only one thing you can do to put it together again. A thing that Jim Slater would like better than anything in the world."

Eddie stared incredulously, trying to keep the strangled hope from his eyes.

"You mean—"

"I mean get out there in his spot next Saturday and pull us through," the Swede said. "And if you flub it, we're outa the national picture for good."

IT SEEMED strange, going out for an opening kickoff again. The kids were scrupulously kind. Sammy Levey said, just before the toss, "I got a lot of good blocking in me today, mister. You come around my side, you'll find holes, and that's a promise."

But the shadow of Slater's loss was black upon them, and they knew it and were afraid.

Eddie said, "This is my day, pals. I didn't want it this way, but it happened. I know you're not Corbin men, but you are to twenty thousand guys and gals up there in the stands. Give them all you can. I—I can't ask for any more."

And then he was out there, and the ball was coming down, and nothing else existed in the world.

The Tryon team was a holdover from last year's good outfit. They had the fearsome Larry Brown, the best running back in the conference, and Lem Sewell, the kid with the snake hips, and a line that could dish it out. They had been scored on just once in seven games. They roared in on Levey before the ball was firm in his hands and exploded him back into the turf. He got up on his own twenty and spat out a tooth.

"This is gonna be fun," he said wryly. "You better kick it, gents. Or they'll push it right over that line for you."

The Swede went back under the goal posts and got off one of his long ones. The Tryon forward wall broke through and almost blocked it, but Sammy Fry got a block away just in time.

And then that famed Tryon offense turned it on.

IT WAS a straight-down-the-middle power stuff, but they had the linemen to open the holes. Alternating a spinner through tackle with Sewell's very special brand of openfield stuff, they were knocking off three and four yards every play.

It was maddening, watching that machine grind out the yardage. It became a dazed pattern in Eddie's brain. Watch for the snap of the ball, take care of the pass spots, and run in, hoping that line would finally hold. From his safety spot, he could take no actual part in the play. Larry Brown was notorious for quick kicks, and if he closed in on a play they'd be promptly crowded back against their goal by one of them.

They came down past the midfield stripe, and Eddie called for time out. They sank back on the grass. They were breathing heavily and the grins had gone from their faces.

The Swede said thoughtfully, "Once I saw a team like this one, at Michigan, the year they had Harmon. They beat the hell outa us."

Levey's lip was blown up like a balloon. He grunted, "They're in the driver's seat now, dishing it out. We still gotta find out how they can take it. You get us that ball, gents. We'll do the rest."

"We'll get it," Blimp said, "on the next kickoff. Because these guys are gonna score.

An' there ain't a damn thing we can do about it!"

Exactly five plays later Larry Brown, behind beautiful blocking, bulled past Soup Train's desperate tackle and fell into the end zone. The Swede roared in and blocked the conversion attempt but the damage had been done.

They were six points down against the toughest team in the business. And that could well be the ball game.

Slowly, out of the uncertainty, they began to come to life. Soup Train took a twenty-yard pass out of nowhere to bring them down to midfield, late in the second quarter. He was grinning when he came back into the huddle.

"You throw a sweet ball," he told Eddie. "You an' me, we might have gone places if we'd played on the same team."

"We got today," Eddie reminded him.

But on the very next play the entire right side of the Tryon forward wall ganged up on Pat Sullivan and they lost eight yards. The Swede kicked out of danger. The guy was infallible when the chips were down. But you don't score touchdowns with defensive football. Tryon was grinding up the field again when the gun barked, ending the half.

THEY were beaten and sore. Sammy Levey was sitting all by himself in a corner, cursing monotonously through his swollen lips. The Old Man started to say something, shook his head and went out of the room. The Swede said, "We done everything right but it comes out wrong against them hunkies."

"They're a better team," Blimp Somerville said flatly. "Let's not kid ourselves."

Eddie stood up. He was sore all over from that beating he had taken. But his voice was steady and cold.

"Okay, front-runners," he said. "Chuck it away in here. If Slater had two legs he'd be beating your brains out."

Levey said thickly, "Are you tryin' to say we're chicken, pal? Because after the game—"

The shadows were low over Corbin Stadium, lowering for the last time he would ever know. Eddie stared out of the window, watching that little oblong of green and white.

"I envied you," he said. "You were famous and you were good. You came here slumming and you're going away crawling and beaten. I don't envy you any more, my friends."

Sonny Fry said, "Go ahead, wonder boy. Give us the old inspiration stuff. I haven't heard it for two years."

Eddie shrugged. It was all so hopeless, trying to make these men understand what was in him.

"It's pretty corny, I guess," he said wearily. "It's like that bronze tablet you all thought was so funny. It's like that lousy little band up there playing half a note off-key, but very bravely. It's the guys who pay two bucks a ticket, knowing their team is gonna get beaten four times out of five, but figuring the fifth time is worth all the rest. It's me, a stumblebum captain of a team that's too good for me to make, an' proud of the honor. It's Corbin, gents, and the men and women who have made her. Sorry if I've bored you, pals. It's time to go out there."

The Swede was rubbing his chin. There was a funny look in his eyes. The room was very silent.

"For an amateur at this inspiration stuff, you' don't do so bad," he said slowly. "Me, I think I'm gonna play me some football for a change!"

THE kickoff went down to Sewell, and he shook himself down to his forty before Train could bring him down. And then it started all over again. That Corbin line, in spite of their savvy and size, was being mousetrapped out of every play. Eddie sent Levey back into the safety spot. The little man was groggy from the punishment he had taken.

Scarcely two plays afterwards, Eddie could see why, all too plainly. That line was hitting with the fury of a giant hammer, with the taste of victory on their lips and in their souls. He went in to back up Tommy Walsh on an offtackle spinner and three men hit him, one after the other. Only a crazy dive by the Swede stopped the play from breaking entirely into the clear.

It became a pattern. A dull, sick routine of diving in, feeling the world crash about your ears, picking yourself up and doing it all over again. After the fourth or fifth time it happened, he began to lose count.

But when he looked at the sideline, he saw that they were not gaining as much. Once, after Sewell had come around Soup Train's end on a naked reverse, he dived straight into that elusive speeding phantom and the lights went out. When he opened his eyes he was on his feet. Train and the Swede were walking him around. There was a kind of baffled wonder in their eyes.

The Swede said, very gently, "If the referee asks you, bud, it's Saturday an' we're in the fourth quarter. Don't give him no wrong answers. We need you in this ball game."

He said, "Nice thinking, pal. I been drawing a blank a long time. What happened to that Sewell?"

"They dragged him off on a shutter," Train said hopefully. "An' we got the ball. You ready to go?"

They went into the huddle. They were on their own forty. Eddie discovered with some surprise. The Swede explained, "You busted that ball right out of Sewell's mitts an' I was lucky enough to fall on it. We got ten minutes an' sixty yards, an' that line is beginning to come apart."

It was a fake pass, ending in a stab at right end. Eddie faded back. His legs, he discovered with some surprise, still obeyed him. Soup was deep, pulling the secondaries out of the play. Sullivan barked, "After me, keed!" and he poured it on, past the Tryon tackle's lunge.

He slid past Larry Brown, just before Blimp took out a hapless wingman with a bone-jarring block. And then he was alone in the middle of the field, and one man was left between him and pay dirt.

It was all instinct, what he did. It was born of the sure knowledge that the big man down there was too fresh to miss. He said, "Take it away, Swede!" and lateralled it straight into Rassmussen's arms. And dove once more into a pile of charging hell, clearing the way. And this time the lights really went out for good.

HE WAS sitting on the bench. His head was very sore and he couldn't see very well.

There was a lot of yelling and it hurt behind his eyes. He put a hand up there, groaning a little, and the Old Man's voice said, "Steady, boy. I wanted you to see this. You earned it."

A little dazedly, Eddie looked at the scoreboard. They were leading, 7 to 6, and there were four minutes left in the ball game. They had the ball on Tryon's twenty, and the Swede was bulling in there for a nice gain.

"A system is one thing, a man's another," the Old Man said. "I'm more proud of my men than my system. The Swede told me to tell you something when you came to."

Above him, the band was going crazy, and ten thousand maniacs were helping out.

"The Swede said, 'Tell him this one is for a stumblebum captain, and a guy on a bronze tablet, and what they stand for. I hope one or both of 'em will be around to see me go over.'"

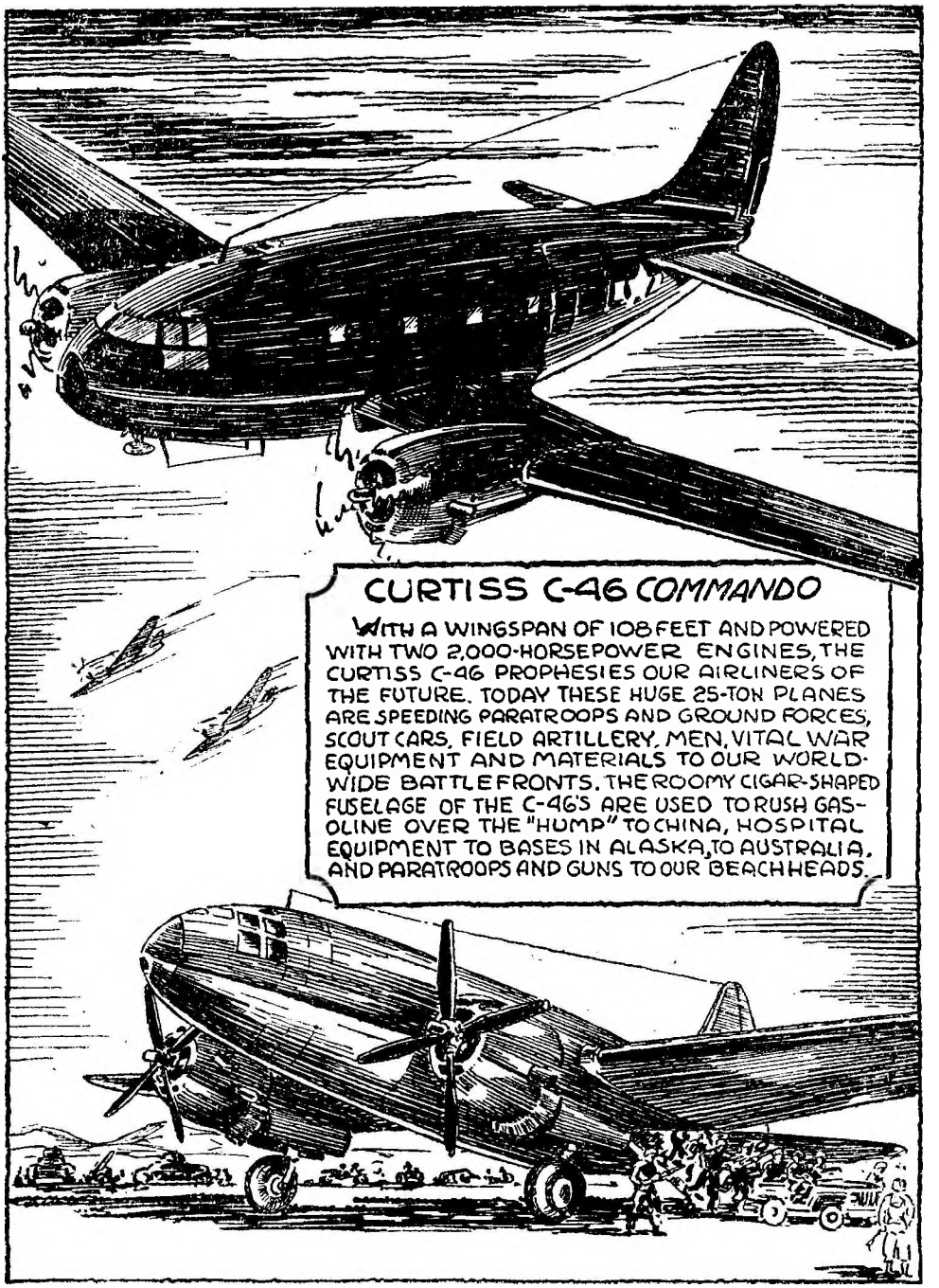
There was a lot of yelling, and the Old Man pulled him to his feet.

"I guess we better see this score," he said. "It's a Corbin team's present to its captain."

It was hard to see, but it was good.

Wings for Victory

BY Jim Kay



CURTISS C-46 COMMANDO

WITH A WINGSPAN OF 108 FEET AND POWERED WITH TWO 2,000-HORSEPOWER ENGINES, THE CURTISS C-46 PROPHESIES OUR AIRLINERS OF THE FUTURE. TODAY THESE HUGE 25-TON PLANES ARE SPEEDING PARATROOPS AND GROUND FORCES, SCOUT CARS, FIELD ARTILLERY, MEN, VITAL WAR EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS TO OUR WORLD-WIDE BATTLE FRONTS. THE ROOMY CIGAR-SHAPED FUSELAGE OF THE C-46'S ARE USED TO RUSH GASOLINE OVER THE "HUMP" TO CHINA, HOSPITAL EQUIPMENT TO BASES IN ALASKA, TO AUSTRALIA, AND PARATROOPS AND GUNS TO OUR BEACHHEADS.

Cannon In Front Of Them

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Author of "Death Has Green Eyes," etc.

THE widest point of the old creek bed, dry and grass-grown, was no more than enough shelter for his spare body. Prone, he peered between tussocks at the prairie. It stretched, flat and empty as the calmest of oceans, to the skyline. Across it rode four horsemen, inexorable as those in the Book of Revelations. An Indian tracker on a bareback sorrel led the way. Next came a gaunt old rider in blue, Major Rovelle. The others were Lieutenant Graham, who hoped his cavalry jacket made him look less than forty, and Sergeant Duckett on a commissary mule.

The Indian pointed, palm-out, to the creek bed, and Major Rovelle took the cigar from under his gray mustache. "I see it," his voice came clearly. "Caldecott saw it, too, when last we hunted prairie chickens. Only cover for miles around big enough to hide more than a rabbit. Circle and close in."

The hiding man cursed mournfully and stood up. He was tall and gaunt in his gray shell jacket and trousers tucked into worn, well-tended riding boots. One hand held his wide-brimmed felt with its officer's cord. His dark young face scowled below the long sweep of his black hair, and his short mustache bristled like a treed cat's.

"If I'm to be taken," he called out, "I won't be taken lying down. Sorry, Major, that I so plainly looked for a hiding place when last we rode out together."

The four converged around him. Sergeant Duckett, heavy and red-faced, clicked his tongue on his chipped teeth. "Tch, tch. He figured to foot it all the way home to Dixie. In this hot sun, too."

Major Rovelle pushed back his slouch hat, wiped his bald brow with his gauntlet,

The Union Armies Made Good Use of Their Artillery-Men—Even the Confederate Ones!

and jiggled ashes from his cigar. "Why do you scorn our hospitality, Captain Caldecott? Your record says that you were rather easily captured at Seven Pines."

"I was covering the withdrawal of my battery," growled the man in gray. "The Confederacy can better spare captains than guns."

"Six days after that," the major recapitulated, "you seized a musket from a guard and jumped from a train. You killed one of those who cornered you. You escaped again in the railway station at Philadelphia, and were as far south as Media when they caught you. All this rather fatigued the authorities to whose attention it was brought. So you were shipped to us here in Minnesota, from where it would seem too far a journey home." The major smiled, and looked rather tired. "You've had the run of the post, and pleasant relationships with us all. I don't feel flattered that you have tried again to escape."

"I'll not deny your kindness," said Captain Caldecott, his dark eyes still smoldering. "But we're going to whip you Yankees before the end of 1862, which doesn't leave me many months to get there and help."

"Unkind to call me a Yankee," protested Lieutenant Graham, touching his gay blond mustache. "Me, I'm a Hoosier. Never even been to New England."

"You quibble, Lieutenant," Major Rovelle told him, then turned back to Caldecott. "You, sir, were sent to Fort Lowery for safe-keeping. Safe-kept you shall be. Please mount behind Sergeant Duckett."

Caldecott tightened his lips and obeyed. The Indian sidled close, a rifle lying ready across his pony's withers. Nothing was said as they rode seven miles back to the fort.

Fort Lowery was typical of the frontier, a quadrangular stockade of upright, sharp-pointed logs, on the bank of a quiet, swift creek. The wall to the east was lined inside with barrack sheds, that to the west with officers' quarters, the hospital, the commissary.

The enclosed ground had been baked and tramped to a bricky hardness. In the center stood the massive magazine building, its approach flanked by two disused cannon. Above it, on a high pole, fluttered the Stars and Stripes. Outside was a loosely strung ring of shacks, tents, parked wagons and picket lines of draft animals, with nearby

encampments of Indians who begged, traded or did odd jobs around the post.

Here were stationed two companies of third-rate infantry. Had those companies been better, they would have been South with the Union armies that were trying so hard in the summer of 1862 to cope with Lee, Jackson and the two Johnstons to the westward. Major Rovelle commanded them as a provisional battalion, and his captains and lieutenants were elderly, uninspired officers who by chance or influence had been activated for this slipshod frontier duty. Under them served one hundred and fifty misfits, convalescents and shambling recruits.

The party dismounted by the guardhouse just inside the main gate. Major Rovelle again addressed his prisoner. "No hard feelings, Captain Caldecott. May I expect you for supper?"

Caldecott bowed. "Honored, sir."

"Sergeant Duckett," said the major, "get a detail of three or four, with a non-commissioned officer or senior private in charge, to attend Captain Caldecott. Relieve the detail each four hours. The captain has the run of the fort, inside the stockade, but hereafter armed guards will be near him and responsible for him at all times."

"Yessir," replied the sergeant, saluting. "It'll give the boys sumpin' to do, sir."

He headed for the barracks, where lolled some handy idlers. An orderly led away the officers' mounts. The Indian gave Caldecott a searching stare, then walked his pony toward the commissary to beg rations. Caldecott remained alone. The scowl had never left his brow.

"Captain—" said a soft voice not far from his elbow.

HE TURNED, sweeping off his hat. Amy Rovelle was always able to approach him without his being aware. Caldecott worried about that, for he felt that a gentleman should divine the nearness of an attractive woman before he saw or heard her.

"You tried to run away," she charged him, very small and demure in her brown muslin, with a parasol cocked over her buckskin-blonde head. "Even after last evening, when we had such fun at our little dance—four couples and three instruments. You could at least have waited a day or two, to keep from embarrassing me."

"You well know, Miss Amy, that it's no question of my personal preferences."

"Oh," and her voice was softer still, "then your preferences, aside from loyalty to your Confederate States, would be to stay here."

"I didn't say that," he reminded her, rather unhappily. "I said it was no question of my personal preferences."

The men Duckett had chosen were approaching under arms. Caldecott turned from them, as if to tramp across the parade ground.

"You were going to ask me to walk?" suggested Amy Rovelle.

She put her hand on his arm. They strolled slowly together across the sun-drenched earth. A little yellow dog, a stray from the Indian teepees, came and trotted with them. Caldecott fancied that one of his guards snickered, some paces to the rear. He fixed his eyes with feigned interest on the nearer of the two dingy old cannon in front of the magazine.

"Those guns," said Amy Rovelle, following his gaze. "What good are they at an infantry post?"

"None," said Caldecott succinctly. He led her a few paces closer. "Obsolete by at least a generation. I can't even tell their make. Look," and he pointed, "no lanyard or firing mechanism. That means no friction primer. They'd be fired by powder in the touch-hole, lighted by a gun match or a linstock."

"You're so knowing about artillery," murmured the girl.

"I was thought to have a talent for that branch at West Point," Caldecott replied, more ponderously than he wished. "Cadet John Pelham and I were honor pupils. They say he's to be chief of horse artillery in General Stuart's cavalry division. If I hadn't been captured, I might—"

"Try not to think of that," she begged. "Tell me about the guns."

He became the lecturer. "They're old cast-iron six-pounders, smoothbores and—"

"Really, Captain! But they must weigh much more than six pounds."

A loud snicker from the guards. Amy Rovelle must have counted on it, for her eyes were dancing. Caldecott chose to appear obtuse.

"The six-pounder designation refers to

the projectile." He stooped and seized the topmost iron shot of the pyramid beside the gun. He had to tug hard to free it from the rust that held it to the others.

"Would the powder charge be six pounds, too?" Amy Rovelle was asking.

He shook his head. "Only a fraction of that. Six pounds of powder might blow the breech of that old gun out, and kill the gunner."

"I wonder," said the corporal, loudly enough for all to hear, "if the safe place to stand isn't in front of a cannon."

Caldecott glared. The corporal saluted against his slouchily ordered musket. He was scrawny, sparse-bearded, and lacked several teeth. "At your service, Captain," he grinned impudently.

"If you were," said Caldecott, "that whole detail would get some healthy exercise to demonstrate the working of a gun before this lady."

"I didn't mean that kind of service," said the corporal hastily. "We never enlisted for no redlegged artillery."

"But it is a sound idea," Major Rovelle told him, coming into view around the corner of the magazine building. "As Sergeant Duckett says, the men lack something to do. Corporal, do as Captain Caldecott may direct you."

The men stared. "If you're serious about gun drill," went on the Major to Caldecott, "I'll send over some others who find time heavy on their hands. Remain on guard, Corporal. The rest of your detail will stack arms and receive instruction from Captain Caldecott."

He nodded, and went away. Amy walked with him, saying something that made them both laugh. Fighting not to gaze after the girl, Caldecott addressed the three bluecoats who lined up dutifully before him.

"To begin with, nomenclature of the most important features of the gun. This," and he pointed, "is the muzzle. The rear half of the barrel is called the reinforce, and the forward half the chase. This knob that attaches to the breech is called the cascabel. At the top here is the touch-hole. These projections by which the gun is fastened to its carriage are the trunnions. The extension that slants down behind to give the gun a firm position is the trail. Is that clear? Any questions?"

They stared, not knowing enough to ask any. The corporal, lounging by the stacked muskets, squinted and spat. Caldecott drew a long breath.

"The crew of a gun is commanded by a non-commissioned officer, and includes eight privates. Two of these are the gunners. The others, who assist in maneuvering, loading, cleaning and firing, are generally designated as cannoneers, and used to be called matrosses—"

"Mattresses!" said a private, and heehawed. "Don't tell me the artillery fights layin' down!"

"Major ordered you under Captain Caldecott's instruction," said Sergeant Duckett, joining the group, "so shut that big mouth. Captain, here comes some more men to learn about cannons. Happen you oughta begin at the beginning again."

CAPTAIN CALDECOTT found his pupils even more difficult than he had expected in infantry, for which he had all the lofty disdain of an artillerist. Most of them were awkward and unwilling, slowing the drill. One or two were interested but full of muddled queries, which slowed it further. But he exercised his detail for four baking sunbright hours. As recall blew, he thankfully reckoned that he had been able to push to the back of his mind both the disappointment of recapture and the less definable uneasiness caused by sight and sound of Amy Rovelle.

"Send me the same men tomorrow if you like," he said to the sergeant, "and I'll instruct in bringing a gun into action. Perhaps somebody will make me a few bricoles."

"Bricoles?" repeated Duckett, his broad red face blank. "What's them, sir?"

"Lengths of cord, with a hook at the end of each. Artillerymen attach them to their waistbelts, to fasten to the gun carriage and bring power to bear in rolling or turning it."

"What's the gun horses for?" asked Duckett. "Well, it's part of the detail, I guess. I'll make your bricoles."

He saluted, as though Caldecott were a commander and not a prisoner, and strode away to form the men for retreat. Caldecott sought the carpenter shed, his now omnipresent guards sauntering behind him. There he prevailed on an artificer to give him two

lengths of stout hickory from a pile of spare wagon spokes. These, Caldecott hoped, would serve for handspikes on the trails of his guns. He also improvised a sponge staff from another pole and a close-lashed wad of sacking. Going to his quarters, he dressed for supper with the Rovelles—dressed with rather a wry face, for his only suitable garments were a blue uniform borrowed from Lieutenant Graham.

MAJOR ROVELLE'S table was of axe-hewn pine, and the home-made chairs had been seated and backed with stretched rawhide, but the cloth was white and the dishes and silver would not have gone amiss on the banquet board of Captain Caldecott's home manor on the Congaree. Amy was a charming hostess, even though she was kept busy directing the clumsy Indian girl who served the venison steak, the boiled corn and the pumpkin pudding. After dessert, when Amy had retired to the little drawing room and Major Rovelle had poured a glass of wine that was not too ordinary, the subject of the gun drill came up.

"I judge, Captain," said the Major, "that you're the only competent artillerist this side of Fort Snelling."

Caldecott accepted a cigar from his host. "If the men I instructed today are any criterion, you are quite right, sir."

"Have you heard of the plans for garrisoning new forts to the west of here?"

Caldecott shook his head above the blue smoke-cloud. "I hear very little news, naturally. But I had rather hoped my people were keeping the Yankees so busy that no soldiers could be spared for fresh frontiers."

"That thought enters into it," said Major Rovelle weightily. "There are many Southern prisoners like yourself, men who didn't run fast enough at this battle or that—"

"We haven't had the running practise of the Yankees," offered Caldecott smoothly. "You should have seen your comrades-in-arms at Manassas, sir."

"You may be right. At any rate, we do hold such prisoners. Many are trustworthy, apart from their difference of opinion on the secession matter. Offers are being made to such as might accept—eh—a service detail. We muster them into units of a military character, with of course competent Unionists in command—"

"Please," interrupted Caldecott, a little more coldly. "Don't spoil what you have made a very pleasant occasion so far this evening. I wouldn't like to think that you would invite me to commit a treason to my country."

The Major's bald brow perspired, though the dining room was not particularly warm. "I didn't mean it that way, Caldecott," he assured his guest. "After all, this part of the world is not directly concerned with the war that being's fought between Southern cotton and New England factories. A man could find and love a life here, without being thought an upholder of either faction."

"My place," said Caldecott, "is with my battery—Sumter Light Artillery of South Carolina. That battery is now in Virginia, with General Lee. Some day it will join the march of triumph through Washington and Philadelphia, perhaps even through Boston. I am away from it only because I was taken prisoner by greatly superior numbers. I'm one of those who didn't run fast enough. To be specific, I didn't run away at all. Two or three of those who came to get me will never run anywhere again. Suppose we say no more about it, Major Rovelle."

"If you like," agreed the Major, and put his hand to the cigar box. "Won't you take some more of these, to smoke in your quarters? And then we'll have a second glass of wine, and join Amy for coffee. I think she wants to tell you about another of our little dances. Poor Amy, I feel that she's wasted here. She should have opportunities for better society than Fort Lowrey can offer."

"Amen to that, sir," nodded Caldecott. And he was coldly formal no more, but wistful.

Next morning, a melancholy squad that had hoped for lazy, sub-vigilant duty as Caldecott's guard detail found itself toiling over the guns. Duckett had made bricoles as he had promised, of odds and ends from a pile of old pack-train lashings. With these fastened to their waists, the men found themselves stirred into a perspiring scamper.

"When you are ordered to move, move on the jump!" Caldecott kept saying. "Don't waddle in like old women to the washtub. Hasn't Sergeant Duckett hammered any muscle onto your bones? Now, attention! The gunners stand at right and left—a little back, you number two gunner, and closer to

the piece. It won't turn and bite you, though if it did you might be more lively."

"These men ain't used to picking up anything heavier than a Springfield musket, sir," temporized the sparse-bearded corporal.

"They'll be used to picking up this old destroying angel before I'm through with them," promised Caldecott. "A little drill and practise, and they'll handle it like a horse-pistol. Hold your places, men. Now you're in something like proper position. Stand at ease, but listen."

HE BECAME the instructor again, speaking flatly and carefully. "At the preparatory command *forward*, every man moves smartly in to his prescribed position by the gun. The hooks of the bricoles are thrust into their corresponding rings of the gun-carriage. The two gunners seize the two handspikes and lift the trail clear of the ground, so that the gun may be moved forward at the command of execution, which is *march*. Questions? If not we'll try it. Attention; Forward—no, no! I said, move smartly! Doesn't anyone know what that means? Fall out here, you number four cannoneer, give me your bricole. I can show you better than I can tell you."

He hitched the cord to his own waist-belt, taking the man's place. "Again, now! Forward!"

At his own word he whipped his lean body in close, and snapped the hook through its proper ring. "March!" he barked, and surged with all his strength into the pull. The men, a little stirred by his example, exerted themselves more strongly, and the gun trundled into motion. "Halt!" ordered Caldecott, and the toiling crew subsided, unhooking the bricoles. The gunners lowered the trail.

"Better," granted the instructor. "Take your bricole back, number four, and see if you can find the same energy your comrades showed just then. Again. Forward!—that's it, move with a will! March! Better, better! Don't slow, keep it moving until I give the word! Halt!

He was gathering an audience. There were stone-faced Indians, civilian traders and mule-skinners, an officer or two, and Amy Rovelle.

He could not help but glance her way and see the smile that brightened the shadow under her parasol. Men of the garrison who were off duty also ambled up to watch. Two of them muttered facetiously and giggled. Sergeant Duckett, passing on his way to the Major's headquarters, heard and paused.

"Captain Caldecott," he called, "I'm assigning those two men who laughed to your detail. Have you anything for them to do?"

"I have," replied Caldecott, and pointed to the two pyramids of round shot by the guns. "Give them coarse brushes and sand, and let them take all the rust from those balls. In a moment I'll give them a turn at dragging this gun. Stand at ease, squad, and catch your breath. The two men who show the most spirit and sense will get a longer rest when the new recruits replace you. Meanwhile, give me your attention and I'll explain the method of bringing the piece to bear in another direction. The squad is called to attention, and the preliminary command is *action left!* or *action right!* Trail is lifted, bricoles are attached, and the gun is turned on one wheel as a pivot, by pulling. We'll try this once, without command."

THE afternoon guard detail got the same instruction, and worked itself into a grudging lather at the gun. In the afternoon, Caldecott instructed in cleaning, which here was badly needed. At his insistence, men fetched grease for the rebellious hubs of the gun-wheels, and labored to scrape away rust and corrosion and ancient clotted mud.

"Bear down on those brushes," Caldecott told them. "You aren't petting a tabby cat. That metal must be more than clean, it must be smooth—inside the barrel as well as out." He took the sponge-staff from the man who languidly wielded it. "Ram it in hard, as if you had your worst enemy in there and wanted to churn him into hash. Like this," and he swabbed the bore of the gun murderously.

Major Rovelle strolled by, and beckoned Caldecott to his side. "I swear, Captain, you're drenching this whole part of Minnesota with the sweat of my men."

"It's good for them, Major," replied Caldecott. "I'm sweating, too, and feel better for it."

"You'd like to specialize in making Union soldiers sweat, eh?"

"A characteristic of my country, sir," smiled Caldecott.

"Mmmm," grunted Rovelle. "I was thinking of the visit to our post next week of Governor Sibley. He's also General Sibley, you know, an old army man of distinguished record. We'll hold an inspection and review for him. Do you think that your artillery squads might oblige with a special demonstration?"

"It's possible. Let me have a non-commissioned officer to train for command."

"You will command."

"I give no shows for Yankee generals," said Caldecott. "A non-commissioned officer if you please, sir."

Rovelle shrugged, and assigned the sparse-bearded corporal. Caldecott made him assume a bricole and do most of the preliminary demonstrating. At recall, the detail fairly staggered away from Caldecott's afternoon drill.

"You're doing me a favor if I may say so, sir," Duckett volunteered as he met Caldecott. "I'm sending you some of my most slovenly men, a-purpose. They're too tired now to go out among the mule skinners for liquor or to the Indian wickiups for funny business with the squaws." He squinted after the dog-weary privates who seemed barely able to reach the door of their barracks. "A little more work, and you'll have whipped them into shape for battle duty."

"If I thought that, sergeant," returned Caldecott, lighting one of Major Rovelle's cigars, "I'd cease my instruction now. But I don't have any high hopes for their future efficiency."

The following day, Major Rovelle decreed a change in gun drill. Two soldiers at a time were told off to stand armed guard, and the gun crews were made up of men whose slackness, disregard of regulations or mild impudence had rendered them liable to punishment. They sulked and perspired, and Caldecott made them serve and drag and clean first one gun and then the other until during rest periods they could only sprawl and gasp in the shade of the magazine building. But his regime bore results. Finally the guns were scrubbed clean, though they would never be shiny. Their wheels turned better with use and axle grease. Somebody painted the wooden parts of the gun-carriages with fresh gray. The men themselves smartened, rather against their own wishes, and at the visit of Governor Sibley they performed and were praised.

Caldecott stood among the civilians, with Amy Rovelle, to watch the parade and inspection. Indians were there, too, a number of them. Caldecott noticed one who stood a little apart from, and in advance of, a knot of feathered and blanket-lad warriors. The man was tall and lean and vigorously made. He wore neatly cut store clothes of black broadcloth, with a high white collar and wide cravat, like a state senator. His head was bare, and his two gleaming black braids framed a big-featured bronze face. His slender, shapely feet were clad in doeskin moccasins, richly beaded. His coat hung open, and Caldecott could see a big sheath-knife belted at his waist.

"That's Little Crow," said a teamster, seeing Caldecott's interest. "Chief of the Santee Sioux down on the Lower Agency near Fort Ridgely. School Injun—church Injun, too."

"One of those?" said Caldecott, and looked again. "Can't say that I like the noble red man when he softens his ways."

"He's not soft," the teamster assured him. "He's toppest fighting man and thinking man of his people. He made all the treaties for this frontier, even asked the missionaries in to teach the Sioux. You ought to hear him sass the agents and traders to get more food and less whiskey for his tribe. See that crooked wrist of his? He hurt it when he was a young buck, drunk and fighting his own brother. So he thinks whiskey is bad medicine. Little Crow's all right."

The chief had heard his name spoken. He turned and stared, not in interest, not in challenge, not coldly and not fiercely. He simply stared.

"He frightens you?" Caldecott asked Amy, but she laughed.

"Indians frighten me? I'm a soldier's daughter, Captain. And that's the man who made the peace treaty. Don't worry about him. You haven't said that you are coming to our dance."

"I am coming," promised Caldecott.

THE dance was scheduled for Saturday August 16. On that evening Caldecott dressed carefully in his borrowed blue uni-

form, and walked with two guards behind him to the building which did duty as occasion demanded for church, instruction hall, officers' club, or ballroom.

Its floor had been made danceable with sprinkled cornmeal, and the walls decked with bunting and prairie flowers. The invaluable Duckett, in brightest buttons and dress sash, superintended the setting of a great punch bowl on a table.

"I have charge here tonight, sir," he said as Caldecott came in. "That's as it should be —sergeant responsible for the punch bowl. That young Squaw that works for the Major seems to have gone away—maybe some buck added her to his herd."

THE music—a teamster and a high private with fiddles, and a German trader with an accordion—already were tuning up in a corner.

The guests chattered together, half a dozen officers of the post, the wives of the two who were married, several pretty girls from the nearer farmsteads and a visiting paymaster. Major Rovelle and Amy came toward Caldecott, with smiles of greeting.

"I have just heard that your Indian servant left you," said Caldecott in his best Congaree-cotillon blend of interest and sympathy.

Amy lifted her round, bare shoulders in a little shrug. "It would have been more aggravating if she'd been better help," she replied. "Anyway, she seems to have been a dutiful daughter."

"You mean, her parents left too?"

"All the Sioux broke camp and left early this morning," Major Rovelle told Caldecott. "I saw them going before breakfast—lodgepoles and buckskin bundles and ponies and everything. I'm not sorry to tell them goodbye, though they didn't wait for that. They beg constantly, steal when they can, and set a bad example for the troops by drinking and loafing. And I'm sorry for their dirty little papooses."

The music began, and the major himself called the figures for a Virginia reel. Amy put her hand, on which sparkled a sapphire, ring, to Caldecott's sleeve.

"This first dance is for you," she said.

They danced. The tune was an enlivenment of "Morning in May." Once the teamster-fiddler sang a few lines to his own playing:

One morning, one morning, one morning in May
I met a pretty couple a-making their way,
And one was a lady so sweet and so fair,
And one was a soldier and a brave volunteer.

"Happy?" Amy whispered as she and Caldecott finished the last figure.

"As happy as I deserve to be."

"Which means, not very happy. Doesn't it? You remember that you're a prisoner, and that there are two armed guards getting a glass of punch right now on the doorstep. Oh," as somebody swaggered up, "you know Captain Rikesaw?"

It was the visiting paymaster, youngish and baldish and plump and smiling. He wore a tremendous amount of gold braid, and seemed about to stumble over his expensive dress sword. Caldecott saw at a glance that Captain Rikesaw had served well in rear of the firing lines, away from guns and battle yells and body-lice. He took the hand extended to him, a little fat-cushioned hand, warm and moist. "How do you do," said Caldecott.

"Servant, sir. You are, I think, the rebel prisoner? You are enjoying yourself, I trust."

"I was assuring Miss Rovelle that I am."

"May I then dilute your happiness a little by taking her from you for this next dance?"

THE fiddles were playing a waltz, and Captain Rikesaw, for all his plumpness and his plainly unaccustomed sword, waltzed well. Better than Caldecott, who watched a moment from near the punch bowl. Duckett ladled him a glass cup of sweetish rose-tinted drink, and offered sugared biscuits on a tray.

"Lemme say," ventured the sergeant, "that you wear them blues like they belonged to you. I never thought I'd admire a rebel, sir, but when you take the boys through your artillery jumps, it's a fair joy to look on it."

"Thanks," said Caldecott. "If I really had time and equipment, I might make them fit to lie in the dirt under a good cannoneer's feet."

"That talk ain't for us as Northerners," said Sergeant Duckett sagely, "that's for us as infantrymen. I understand artillery tastes,

sir. My brother, he's a redleg, Second Michigan Field, and some days he wouldn't favor me by looking down his nose to me. More punch maybe, sir?"

"Thanks, no. I'll step outside for a cigar."

Caldecott walked out into the open. His hovering guards dropped in behind him at about twelve paces' distance. Smoking, Caldecott looked at the half moon overhead, and the silver and black scene it made of the magazine building, the two old guns, the bare, empty parade ground. The barracks beyond had a candle or two in their windows. Fort Lowery was not, he reflected, a bad place to live after all. Major Rovelle was a good officer. He got as much as could be gotten, out of a dull assignment with inferior troops. If he, Captain Caldecott, weren't sworn to the South, he would not feel badly serving under the Major, and going to little dances with Amy Rovelle, taking supper with Amy Rovelle, strolling and talking with Amy Rovelle.

IN THE middle distance, the music finished its one-two-three rhythm. There was faint applause. Caldecott turned back from his quiet walk, which had taken him as far as the carpenter shop. Amy would have finished dancing with the paymaster. Caldecott could not, with propriety, ask for the very next dance, probably it was taken anyway; but he could watch her with a partner who had less pompous grace than Rikesaw.

But as Caldecott, still smoking, drew near the building where the dance was in progress, he could hear the voice of the very man he had come outside to avoid watching. Captain Rikesaw was saying something, in a tone at once gay and insistent, in the dark little vacant space between the dance building and the store shed next on the right. And Amy Rovelle was with him, answering with gentle firmness:

"No, Captain. I didn't walk outside with you for anything like this."

"Forgive me," Rikesaw said, with all the smooth false courtesy in the world. "I take it that the rebels, with their genius for countermarches and flanking movements, have reached you before me."

"That sounds like a riddle, Captain Rikesaw, and not a nice one."

"Then," he sad, "let us be plain-spoken, like these frontier people about us. Your interest is all in that prisoner from the South. The man you introduced, the rebel artillery officer. Isn't his name Caldecott, or something like that?"

CALDECOTT paused, just in the shelter of the near corner of the carpenter shed. He took the cigar from between his lips and, like a scout reconnoitering close to the enemy, he expelled some of his breath, the better to hear.

"Captain Caldecott is a man of worth," said Amy Rovelle, "and he can be a man of use, too."

"Use?" repeated Rikesaw. "You mean in amusing you, and commanding that comical fatigue party of naughty soldiers around the old guns yonder?"

"This new West," admonished Amy loftily, "can use men like Captain Caldecott."

"Ah," breathed Rikesaw. "You mean those military units made up of safe and reasonable Southern captives. But your father, the Major, seems to have little hope of inducing Caldecott to enlist."

"My father is a man," said Amy Rovelle. "I think that a sympathetic woman may do more toward persuading Captain Caldecott."

Caldecott dropped his cigar and ground out its glow with boot heel. He walked into the open space. Amy Rovelle turned toward him, her face and shoulders gleaming palely in the dimness, and fell silent. Caldecott drew himself up and bowed as though to the wife of a senator.

"You flatter me too much, ma'am, by setting the value of my services so high," he said. He walked two heavy paces closer, and paused again, standing stiffly at attention. "Or is it that you set your own value so low as to employ yourself to win another recruit for that miserable bunch of traitors?"

He could see and hear the sharp intake of her breath. Rikesaw spoke, fidgeting a little.

"They teach you rebel gunners how to spy, don't they?"

"I heard only by chance as I passed by," replied Caldecott, making the words as slow and even and chill as the beating of his heart. "But for the chance I am humbly grateful. A soldier is fortunate to know the position and intention of the enemy."

"Please!" cried Amy Rovelle. "You're terribly wrong. You must know I didn't mean it as you think. I know you're unhappy,

I wanted to do what would help—help you, rather than us—"

"Ma'am," Caldecott interrupted her, "save your pity for who needs it. I do not look on myself as a pitiable figure."

"If you knew my genuine feelings—" she began again, and again he interrupted:

"By your leave, I do not think you have any genuine feelings."

"That's a cowardly insult," said Rikesaw.

Caldecott whirled suddenly and savagely toward the paymaster, who sprang back in alarm and drew his dress sword.

UP WENT Caldecott's left arm, half breaking the downsweep of the blade. A cavalry saber, sharpened, would have slashed him to the skull. As it was, the dull edge of the weapon only beat him to his knees. One hand on the ground pawed up a mass of loose grit. In less than a heartbeat Caldecott was up again, throwing his handful straight in Rikesaw's face. The paymaster shrieked that he was blinded and Caldecott springing like a lean fox on a partridge, wrested the sword from him.

The two guards rushed from behind. Caldecott had forgotten them in that savage moment. He bashed the face of one with the curved guard of the sword, and the other let him have a musket-butt in the ribs, winding and staggering him. Both Rikesaw and Amy Rovelle were screaming, and others came running. It was Duckett, his dress sash fluttering, who disarmed Caldecott.

Major Rovelle, too, was there, confronting Caldecott but speaking to the guards. "Put him," he ordered, "in the guardhouse. In a cell by himself." Then, to the people at the doorway, "Please don't be alarmed. The trouble is over. Ask the music to play for the next dance."

It was ten o'clock on the morning of Monday, August 18. Caldecott had been in solitary confinement for thirty-six hours.

He had asked for but one thing, his worn gray regimentals. Now he sat on his bunk, wearing trousers and boots only, for the day had begun with bitter heat. Sweat beaded his lean, knotted chest, his shoulders, his unshaven cheeks. He looked languidly at the untasted bacon and bread that had been set on a stool for his breakfast. As languidly his eyes turned to the stout door of planking, with its little wrought-iron grating, that shut him in.

Yesterday, the dawn after his imprisonment, Major Rovelle had looked in through the grating, and Caldecott had asked him not to talk. The Major had then promised to come back this morning. He had not done so yet, perhaps he was busy. There did seem to be much activity outside the guardhouse, tramping of men and beasts and a hubbub of voices. An emigrant train might be stopping, or the entire garrison was involved in some elaborate and exciting duty. Caldecott would not bother to surmise, any more than he had bothered to surmise what was in that note Amy Rovelle had sent him, which he had had sent back unopened.

Sitting there in hot solitude, he told himself that everything was better this way. If Amy Rovelle hated him now, Amy Rovelle was right. If the garrison saw and treated him as a dangerous enemy, the garrison was right. Everyone was right, himself included. At least they knew now that he took his stand to live and die for Dixie. He could place no wish before the wish to gallop with his guns of the Confederacy, to whirl them into action and drive back the Yankees. It was as if he could hear them now, firing again and again, yelling and ringing from far down inside himself.

No. Not inside himself.

MANY guns were really being fired, from somewhere beyond the fort. They crackled and rolled in volleys, then in a prolonged clamor. Closer, men began to yell and women to scream. Someone was giving orders, and someone else gave other orders at the same time, so that the two sets cancelled each other out.

Just outside somebody cursed in a voice that trembled, and then whimpered like a dog. More distant, but penetrating as a high animal scream, came a quavering whoop. Another, and many whoops. And incessant gunfire.

Then a bugle sounded, some of the notes flatting, but the call was recognizable. It was retreat. The men of the garrison were retreating from something.

Caldecott was standing up, trying to see through his grating. His mouth had gone dry, his heart tried to hammer its way out of him. That was battle—what battle? What

had gone on in the war that he, as a prisoner, had not been allowed to know? The South must be invading, he thought wildly, must have invaded so far and so successfully that his comrades were even now raging among the remote forts of the frontier. Next instant he told himself bitterly that the thought was too fantastic. But the battle and the yells went on.

Boots scampered in the inner corridor of the guardhouse. He heard the rattle of a key in a lock, opening the next cell but one. Then the next cell. Caldecott stared and listened.

"Out, you," he heard a voice pant. "Outside and fight."

"Fight?" came the stupid voice of a prisoner. "How —"

"Get to barracks and grab your muskets!" Now his own door flew open. There stood the sergeant of the guard, pistol in one hand, key in the other. There was blood on his cheek.

"You, too, reb," he said. "Out with you. It's Indians."

Caldecott took a step forward, uncomprehending. "Indians —"

"The whole Sioux nation. Thousands of bucks. They've killed everybody who couldn't get inside. Find a gun somewhere, and —"

Caldecott ran out, past the two men from the other cells. They followed him. He paused beside the body of a man at the very door. It was a sentry, hit by two bullets, one through the chest, the other through the temple. Shot, probably, before they could close the main gate.

His fellow-prisoners joined him. One took the sentry's fallen musket and began to unbuckle the belt and cartridge box. The other pawed at Caldecott's naked shoulder.

"Sir, what shall we do?"

"You have your orders," said Caldecott, and ran toward the center of the churning parade ground.

It swarmed with settlers—men, women and children. Most of the children were crying, and women screamed and fluttered like terrified fowl. Dogs barked. Past the mob, facing toward the row of officers' quarters and store buildings, drew up a thin, wavering line of bluecoats. Here and there sprawled dead and wounded. Beyond them came the crackle of guns, and above the stockade rose smoke and tongues of flame. The outside tents and shacks must be afire, and most of the horses from the picket-lines would be run off, while the Indians were closing in. There must be a lot of them.

Lieutenant Graham was tramping swiftly among the settlers, choosing such men as seemed to have fight in them.

"Get into that line with the troops," he commanded them harshly. "Aren't you armed? No? There's plenty of muskets lying where casualties dropped them. Grab them. And all women and children into the magazine!" He saw Caldecott. "You get into line, too!"

"What's up?" Caldecott called to him.

"The Sioux nation's up! Little Chow must have been planning this for months! They're burning every farm and scalping every settler they can find! We tried to tackle them outside, and they chased us in like chickens!"

"Sir," the man who had come from the cell was saying again, "what shall I do?"

Caldecott took a good look at him. He was one of the incorrigibles who had done long hours of gun-drill, neither bright nor willing gun-drill. Now he turned to the man from whom he had taken the greater part of recent orders. Someone had come up on Caldecott's other side, Sergeant Duckett. He held out a lighted cigar, one of Major Rovelle's.

"Take it," he urged.

Caldecott stared, and Duckett hurriedly explained. "Major said I was to go into the magazine with the women and kids. They mustn't live for the Sioux to get hold of—so, if the fort's taken, I was to touch off all the powder with this. But if you go, sir, I can make a hand fighting out here."

Caldecott nodded and took the cigar. Thrusting it into his mouth, he inhaled to make the end of it glow red. He strode toward the magazine, into which the women were being herded.

A MIGHTY chorused shout came from the officers' quarters, and the soldiers backed hastily into view, toward the line on the parade. After them came Indian whoops, that sounded as if devils had possessed a flock of turkeys.

"They're inside," chattered a voice at his

elbow. It was Captain Rikesaw, goggling and trembling. "There are doors cut from the officers' rooms through the stockade. They're in the fort. We're done for."

Major Rovelle and other officers hurried along the line, bullying those who retreated into turning back to face the buildings, from which came hot rifle fire. A soldier dropped and lay still. Another sank to his knees, screaming and holding both hands to his belly. The return fire could not find the Indians, who howled defiance from the windows and doors.

"They'll rush the line in a moment," Rikesaw was moaning. Caldecott left him and came to the door of the magazine, into which women and children crowded together. He saw kegs of powder, ready torn open. He sucked on the cigar.

"Kill me," said the voice of Amy Rovelle. As usual, she had come to him before he knew she was there. "Kill me. Fearful, horrible things happen if you're captured by the Sioux."

Past her, just inside the doorway, lay the improvised sponge-staff and bricoles with which Caldecott had conducted his gun drills. There, too was a collection of iron junk, some broken links of chain and a wooden box of wrought iron nails that had been salvaged from a dismantled shed. A thought began to form in his head.

"What, sir, shall I do?" asked the man who had followed him from the guardhouse.

"You heard orders from your sergeant," growled Caldecott. "Why don't you take your post?"

At the word "post," the fellow moved toward the nearest gun, then turned in the direction of the line of soldiers. He had almost formed for gun-drill. Caldecott sprang after him.

"Wait! The squad!"

He looked this way and that. Within a dozen paces stood the sparse-bearded corporal. Caldecott hailed him.

"Get them—all of them you can! Everyone who learned to handle the guns! Don't gobble at me, do as you're told!"

Next instant he was inside the magazine. Seizing an open keg of powder, he wrestled it into the open and along toward the guns. Fishing his handkerchief from his pocket, he palmed in what he guessed and hoped would be a proper charge. He slid this into a gun-muzzle as the corporal herded several soldiers to him, men he recognized from the drill details.

"Ram that home," he ordered. "Quick's the word—the sponge-staff's inside there. Some of you others, hop out here with those chain-links and nails!"

The man who had dogged his footsteps went to work with the sponge-staff. Others came with the iron fragments, and Caldecott seized double handfuls.

"In with these, now. Wad them. Tear a sleeve from your shirt, number four! Hello, Corporal! Load the other gun and take command! No, not all of you—into the bricoles, you and you and you other two!" He blew out cigar smoke. "Now, attention! Posts! Action half left—slew her around toward those Indians—Jump!"

The bricole-hooks clattered into the rings. Caldecott himself hoisted the trail. The gun turned on its right wheel, its muzzle pointing to the buildings from which the Indians, increasing their advantage with every moment, fired at the exposed soldiers.

"To the other gun now!" cried Caldecott, and led them on the run. "Posts, all of you! Handle those bricoles like men, not bear cubs! To action! Forward! March!"

THEY lugged the gun into motion and forward, still only half comprehending but obeying, as they had learned to obey, the shouts of Caldecott. "Half left, march!" he ordered. "Now, bring her into line with the other! Halt!"

They dropped the piece into its new position. "Is this gun loaded, Corporal?" snapped Caldecott.

"Yes, sir. Like you showed us."

"Then prime it. Pour the touch-hole full of rifle powder." He spun on his heel and strode back to the first gun. Amy Rovelle waited beside it.

"I asked you to kill me," she said.

"Get back inside there!" he ordered her, as crisply as though she were one of the amateur cannoneers. "Quick!"

"The line," Captain Rikesaw was stammering. "The line's breaking. It's breaking."

It was. Major Rovelle and the other officers scolded and begged, striking at men with their sword-flats or shoving them with their hands, but it was no use. The men

of the garrison, poor troops to begin with and now mixed with wild-eyed civilians, could not stand up to the fire from the captured buildings. To right and left they retreated, then turned and ran. Yet another sky-ripping howl of triumph beat upward from the captured wall of the stockade, and into view came the boldest of the Indians. Brown, naked, paint-spattered, feathered, they danced and waved their weapons. Others stole from the doors or windows, or scrambled over the top of the stockade, reenforcing them. They were gathering to rush the magazine.

Caldecott stooped beside a fallen infantryman and took a cartridge from the box at the belt. He bit it open and painstakingly he primed the cannon. His other hand took the cigar from his mouth.

The Indians whooped, and Caldecott whooped back, high and shrill.

"Yieeeeeee-heeeeeee!"

The highest north, for all that history shows to the contrary, that ever the rebel yell was raised in battle. Caldecott pressed the lighted end of the cigar to the touchhole.

The gun roared, and leaped. He pondered, in the whipping smoke cloud that smudged his face and stung his eyes and nose, that he must have come very close to a dangerous over-loading. A breeze whipped the smoke away in the bright air, and he could see the Indians again.

They were not charging. Almost at the center of the mass that had formed now showed a gap, and beyond it a door had been shattered on its hinges. A dozen brown figures thrashed on the ground, figures that subsided even as he looked. To either side the unhurt warriors turned from their prey to look, to press in and help. Indians have always tried to save their own wounded, to carry away their own dead. Caldecott rushed again to the second gun.

"Sponge and load Number One piece!" he growled. "Corporal, take charge, and double-quick everywhere. No, stay here, one of you!" He caught the elbow of a man. It was the shivering Captain Rikesaw. "You'll do. Grab this trail with me. We're laying closer to the target!"

Rikesaw dumbly obeyed. A surging effort of both their bodies changed the direction of the gun ever so little. Stooping, Caldecott squinted along the barrel and saw that it lay into the thickest press of brown flesh. He shoved Rikesaw clear of any recoil, and with his cigar ignited the priming.

ANOTHER bellowing explosion, a quaking of the ground, an upsweep of smoke—and another hole torn in the great huddle of Sioux. This time he heard cheers and orders behind him. The defenders who had retreated past the magazine building had paused. They fired a volley, ragged and ill-aimed, but it struck down three or four more Indians. Caldecott threw back his head and yelled again as he darted back to his first gun. Speaking no word, he touched it off.

The third discharge was enough, or nearly so. The smoke cleared to show the attackers scrambling frantically over the sharp points of the stockade poles.

"Again," Caldecott coughed in the reek. "Load again."

"We've used all that old iron," the corporal said.

"Then go to those civilian dead," and Caldecott pointed to still bodies. "They were using old muzzle-loaders. Bring their bullet pouches, and quick! Two of you charge with powder and one of the round shot from that pile."

As the Indians hurried out of sight, he fired his fourth shot at the stockade itself, between two buildings. The solid globe of metal smashed two of the upright logs out of the way. Rikesaw cried out in protest.

"You've opened a way for them to come back!"

"Yep," offered one of the privates. "They left dead and wounded, and no Sioux will do that if he can help! They'll be bunching up outside to rush again—"

"I hope so." Caldecott faced the returning corporal across the gun. "Got the bullet pouches? How many? Well, sponge and load once more, with all those bullets!"

It was done.

"Posts!" cried Caldecott, with all the power of his wearying lungs. "To action! Fast with your bricoles! Grab a handspike, you paymaster! We're going forward to that embrasure I blew for us! Forward! Maaarch!"

The gun rolled away, its panting crew straining like plough-mules. Rikesaw's

plump body struggled as hard as any. Caldecott, holding one of the handspikes, steered the muzzle full to the breech his round shot had made, and through until the wheels thudded into the logs on either side. "Halt!" he said, and the men dropped the gun.

Outside, the Indians had massed once more, and stole gamely forward. Caldecott could see them, the tight-strained skin of their painted jaws, the glitter of their eyes, the heave of their naked chests.

Priming the piece himself, he touched off his fifth gun of the day.

Full into the face of the Sioux spat the great mass of musket balls. It was as if a giant had blown them away with its breath. As the smoke lifted, Caldecott saw them running. One or two tried to lift wounded comrades. Others strove only to reach the herd of ponies to the rear, catching at manes and lariats, galloping away, retreating, with no thought but distance between themselves and the fire of the cannon.

Musketry whipped the flying warriors along. Major Rovelle had forced his rallied troops back to the recaptured wall. Over the stockade vaulted a gaunt civilian, a gaunt hunter in fringed buckskin. Kneeling by the nearest fallen Sioux, he ran the point of his knife around the crown and tore away the scalp. Rising to his feet, he waved the bloody trophy and howled insults.

Rikesaw was quivering again, but with exultation. One plump hand smote so hard on Caldecott's bare, powder-blackened shoulder that Caldecott dropped the cigar that had served him for gun match.

"We won," Rikesaw croaked, with tears on his round pink cheeks. "The fight's over—"

"It's just begun," said Major Rovelle.

The commander came close to Caldecott. "Captain," he said, "I must have—at pistol point, if necessary—your signed and sworn parole not to attempt another escape."

"Sir!" protested Caldecott.

"The fight's just begun, I said. We beat them back from here—but they'll have to be beaten back from all Minnesota. We won't be safe until the last Sioux is dead or driven across the Missouri River."

"That means—" began Rikesaw, but the major waved him to silence.

"That means a levy of every man who can lift a musket, thousands of raw recruits and miles of marching and God knows how many battles. This garrison," and Rovelle made a sweeping gesture toward the space behind them, "will be the nucleus for a provisional brigade, or even a division. My lieutenants will command battalions, and the most gander-headed private will strut around as an acting sergeant. As for me, for the duration of the campaign I must perform the duties of a general officer."

"What has this to do with my parole?" demanded Caldecott, glaring in mystified apprehension.

"I'll need these two old guns put in shape to take the field," Major Rovelle told him. "And I'll need a chief of artillery to command them. And that's why you must promise not to run away, Captain Caldecott. You and your guns are going after the Indians with me."

HISTORIES, encyclopedias and contemporary newspapers outline the rest; how the Sioux, hurled back at the instant of delirious victory, hung back and licked their wounds, while Governor Sibley, energetic and methodical, mustered men in the unharried eastern settlements and marched to relieve the frontier; how there was fighting at Birch Coulee and Woods Lake, with the issue more than once in the most delicate of balances; and how, as always, the white men's weapons and discipline triumphed at last. Fifteen hundred Indians were captured, leaders of the uprising hanged publicly, the rest of the Sioux driven far to westward. By the end of September the shaken refugee settlers were rebuilding their burned homes and shaking off the nightmare of terror.

At temporary quarters in a New Ulm tavern, Sibley found time to confer for a few moments with the paroled captive whose guns had pounded to pieces three Sioux charges at Woods Lake, and who had joined Major McLaren's command to repulse, in close fight, the last attack of Little Crow on the shores of the Yellow Medicine River. Caldecott, looking at Sibley, remembered pictures of Edgar Allan Poe, but the Minnesota governor was calmer, older, more rugged.

"Captain," Sibley began, "I wish to commend your intelligence and courage, which have helped make this campaign successful.

And I wish to bring up again the topic of garrison service for such captured Confederates as will accept it. I think a commission could be arranged for you."

"With all respect, no." Caldecott was firm, but not as bitter as he would have been a month past. "At Fort Lowery I was fighting for my life, and for the lives of whites against savages. The later campaign was almost as critical, and Major Rovelle had insisted on my parole. Now, if you please, I would like my parole back."

"I anticipated this," said Sibley rather wearily. "Your parole will not be returned to you."

CALDECOTT opened his mouth, closed it again, stared and frowned.

"Under that parole," went on the governor, "you will be sent South. You will be on your honor not to fight against the Union until properly exchanged." He eyed Caldecott speculatively. "If I am any judge of men, sir, you'll hound your Richmond government until the exchange is made, and we'll have you and your gunnery skill to contend with before the first snow. However, I'm governor here, and I can arrange it thus."

He looked past Caldecott to someone at the door. "Come in, Major."

Caldecott turned. "I daresay, Major Rovelle, I can thank you for this favor."

Major Rovelle nodded his bald head. "To some extent, yes. To a greater extent, thank my daughter Amy. She hounded the governor and myself into doing it, as a courtesy due you for services rendered."

Caldecott's hard lips trembled at last. "I didn't think she'd want to."

"Oh, she worked it all out. She intends to go with you."

Caldecott could only stare again. The major held out his hand.

"Congratulations, or commiserations, whichever you want. But you can't get out of it, Captain. Amy has ten times the executive stubbornness of her father, and her mind is made up. The peculiar attitude toward this war—on Washington's books it isn't a war at all, only a very big rebellion—classes civilian members of the families of rebel army personnel as citizens whose rights to travel anywhere may not be infringed on. And Amy is set on going South as part of your family. She will certainly settle the details within the hour.

"Major," Caldecott managed at last, "you take this very calmly and kindly."

"It's not as simple as I make it sound, my boy. I'm only an elderly soldier on an unimportant assignment, but I try to be farsighted and patriotic. This war isn't going on forever. The young folks of North and South will have a new America to build and make great—a new America in one part, or two parts. Win or lose, we can't get along without each other."

"I'm trying to see what you mean, sir," said Caldecott.

"You'll see, sooner or later. I have confidence in you and in Amy. You'll help the country out of a trying situation. But I'll incur her displeasure by keeping you here. She's waiting down the street, at the home of the Rutledge's. Mr. Rutledge is a minister of the—"

Caldecott was gone, without apology or other word, almost as swiftly as a shot from one of his ancient cannon.

Left alone together, Governor Sibley and Major Rovelle looked at each other. Later they argued over which of them achieved the first wink.

Reef-Netting Is a Game of a Thousand Tricks

OVERFLOW

By BERT DAVID ROSS

Author of "Scandia Reef," etc.

YOUNG Shale was thinking as he paced the beach how much he wanted this job Gaffer and Black Matt — the newcomers from Alaska — had offered him. "Me! Head-man at Cold Point reef-net camp! But they'd better let me run it my way. Gaffer's got himself a name all right, salmon trapping up North. He's got guts too—and luck. But this game is different. The San Juans aren't the same as Alaska."

Shale had just landed at Cold Point after bringing the two forty-foot reef-net boats around from Deer Harbor. Black Matt the Dalmatian had towed them with his fish-buying tug; Matt brought along his wife and Vicki, their nineteen-year-old girl.

As quick as their tug sighted camp Shale saw Gaffer had tangled the lines again; he was anchoring the fish scow at the outer edge of treacherous Cold Point Reef—a mile from shore!

Waiting for Gaffer to come in from his job, Shale cussed. "I wouldn't tell them how to run a fish-trap; they'll have to let me run this reef-net—this is my game."

Reef-netting, Shale knew, was a game of a thousand tricks. He'd learned it from his

dad. His dad had learned it from the Indians who started it. Long before Van Couver discovered the Sound the Indians were catching salmon with nets woven from willow bark, nets hung between huge cedar dug-outs.

Gaffer's skiff beached and he stepped ashore, the inch-wide scar down the side of his bronzed face puckering as he spit his snoose sideways into the water. He grabbed up some gear with the wicked fish-gaff which took the place of his left hand—the gaff that had given him his name.

"Let's get this straight, Gaffer," demanded Shale. "Do you think you're going to make the crew stand the loss if that scow breaks loose, loaded with fish? She ain't safe, anchored."

Gaffer sneered, "Breaks loose? Hell! She'll hold 'til your dinky channel freezes over."

"You don't know President Channel! How about the Overflow?"

"What do you mean—'Overflow'?"

"Fraser River Overflow! You never heard of it! Snow melts back there in the Selkirks and pours a yellow stream of mud and drift a mile wide through the channel here. It don't come every year," Shale added, "but you got to figure on it."

Gaffer laughed contemptuously. "You think a river fifty miles away will rile this lake? You're nuts, kid." He stooped to unload some more gear from the skiff.

"Listen, Gaffer!" Shale's big hand grabbed the boss' slicker and pulled him upright. "If we lose a scow full of fish due to your anchoring it out there, you'll have to pay the crew their loss. You're a damn fool if you don't reckon on the overflow."

Gaffer jerked loose. He scowled into Shale's face. His good hand rubbed his disfigured cheek, blood pulsing under the white scar.

He said sourly:

"You make it your job to watch for this Overflow of yourn if you're scared of it. That's what I'm hirin' you for. Tell me when it's coming; we'll pull the scow ashore."

He added, "Black Matt's got to pick up our fish on the midnight trip. So I'm anchorin' the scow to save rowing it out every night."

The midnight call! That meant one of the crew would have to stay out in the scow every night to gaff the fish on the tug! One of the crew would be on the raw edge every day.

Gaffer surprised him. "You won't need to send a man out—Black Matt'll gaff the fish aboard."

"Hell! How'll we check the count?" argued Shale. "And what's to keep another tug from sliding down tide with her lights out and stealing our fish before Matt picks 'em up?"

"Vicki'll stay on the scow nights," explained Gaffer.

"Vicki!" Shale cried. "You'd trust a young girl? What's Matt thinking of to let his girl take a chance like that?" Shale remembered how young the girl looked coming from Deer Harbor that morning, overalls and jersey blowing tight against her lithe body, her wavy black hair flying in the wind.

"Don't start worryin' about the girl—she's mine!" Gaffer's voice was threatening. "You watch your step, Kid, or I'll rip your face open—and no dame'll look at you!"

SHALE had enough to do without bothering about any girl and she stayed out of his way too. But every evening as he sat with some of the men on the high flat top of Cold Point Rock watching salmon jump out in the Sound, he would see her sculling her skiff across the reef to the fish scow. And the conviction grew on him that if she were lost in a storm or in the unpredictable Overflow, it would be his fault.

He found himself following her with his eyes as she went about the camp. And at night he would imagine he heard her low voice or her cheery laugh above the storm and he would sit up on his cot sweating, realizing that she was out on the scow, alone.

One evening he came head-on into Vicki's mother in the trail. She had her apron full of some greens she had found in the woods. Shale answered her smiling greeting. He asked:

"Aren't you worried about Vicki alone out on the scow at night?" The old lady looked like that picture in his mother's bedroom of the fat peasant.

"Veeki? She take care of herself all right. The weend she blow too bad—Veeki stay there all night. The scow bust loose, Veeki she ride her out an' sweeng her light."

Maybe, thought Shale. These Alaskans think Puget Sound is harmless as a lake,

just because the channels are narrow. It's no use trying to tell them what the Overflow is like.

Four weeks rolled past. The schools of salmon were large now. The great fish plowed along more and more intent on reaching the mountain streams by the time their roe had swelled and ripened.

Vicki came to the big net each day for the excitment. When Gaffer was in the crew she would go to his boat. But on these days when he was at the cannery or at one of his other reef-net camps, she would sit on the gunwale in Shale's boat, just back of his lookout perch.

"It smells good out here," she said one day. "Don't you love the salt water?"

"Uh-huh!" he replied in the cautious whisper that he had to use when no wind was blowing. Salmon, drifting warily over the floor lines into the net might be startled and flash away at a sound or a move from upon the perch.

He dare not take his eyes from the channel between the two boats where the huge net hung suspended twenty feet deep. A hundred salmon, dark backed and camouflaged with sea-weed coloration might be down there and the only sign he would have of them would be one single flash of a silver tail or an instant's glimpse of a white belly.

His eyes, sweeping the channel suddenly came upon hers reflected there below him. She was smiling. He wondered if he were mistaken—she might only be gazing into the water, unseeing, dreaming happy thoughts.

But she whispered, "Your eyes look so blue!"

She was looking at him! She was smiling. And her eyes reflected there in the water, were tender with love.

He clung to the upright sapling lashed to his perch. His knees suddenly felt weak.

"Vicki!" he whispered, so low that the man on the front seat could not hear. But to Shale that whispered word rang out, resounding from boat to boat and off across the water, shouting to all the world his joy and his surprise.

She came down to the beach where he worked alone the next Saturday. Gaffer and the crew had gone to Deer Harbor to collect fish money and to stock up on whiskey.

"You don't drink up your money," she said, brushing the wavy black hair back from her face and smiling as she leaned against the old boat he was caulking.

"No. I'm buying a little farm over in Spirea Valley. I need my money." His voice was husky from the unexpected pleasure of talking to her alone. "Do you like a farm?"

"More than anything else. I love it—I like this, too. Fish camps, boats, I don't suppose Gaffer—"

She stopped, bending her head and kicking at something on the beach. Shale thought he had never seen anything so lovely as the curve of her soft, tanned neck.

She faced him again. "Tell me, Shale, what is the Overflow? What must I do if it comes? Will we know it is coming?"

SHALE had no trouble talking now. He told her about the winding river it made; about its power and its sudden and unpredictable shifting from side to side; and about the fog which usually blanketed it.

"You can't tell that it's coming or how bad it'll be. We can't always tell down here when there is a big thaw in the Selkirks. If it catches you, don't try to row across the reef in the fog—row west, toward Waldron Island. The fog horn at Saturna and the roar of the Overflow will give you your direction; they'll be north of you."

They chatted, Vicki taking a caulking iron and helping him, standing close at his side. Vicki's mother called dinner.

"Tell her you'll be there in a minute—*wait!*"

The color left Vicki's face, but she did as he asked, stepping back under the shelter of a gnarled juniper.

"Vicki—are you going to marry Gaffer?" he blurted out. "You don't love him! I want you! I want to marry you. I love you!" His hands were clenched but he did not touch her.

"You love me! I know, Shale, but papa wants it this way. With Gaffer's money to help, papa will be a big man in the salmon fishing in a few years. Our people are that way, Shale. And I must do as my father and mother say."

"But why? You're in America now! It's different here. You've a right to be happy, and you'll not be—"

"Who can say? There is a proverb in Dalmatia: 'Marry hot, grow cold; marry warm,

grow warmer'. I am different from other girls; they talk so awfully about their parents—like strangers they despise! No, Shale I must do as he says."

They heard someone running down the cliff.

It was Gaffer! "Huh! *This* is where you two are!" His face was purple, the blood surging dark under his scar. He turned on Vicki. "What were you saying to—to him?"

"I was telling him an old saying of our people in—"

Shale cut in. "I asked her to marry me. She said her father was making her tie up with you. She told me a proverb the Dalmatians have—that she'd be better off to marry you even if she didn't love you."

Gaffer's arm with the steel hook was tensed. He stood crouched, his hard eyes boring into Shale's face.

"You dumb kid!" he sneered. "It wouldn't even be fun to tear your face open." He rested his hook-hand in his belt and turned to Vicki. "Come on, girl. I got a car on the road at East Sound. We're goin' to Bill's for chicken supper."

Shale watched them go. He felt deflated. He wondered if Gaffer was right—that he was just a dumb kid. He had hoped Gaffer would fight.

THE peak of the run had hit the Channel. There was grueling work every hour of flood tide. Shale dropped into his bunk at night, glad that there was no time for painful dreaming about Vicki. But little things kept his love burning.

There was the day of the southeaster—when the huge schools of salmon slid past the mouth of the channel to the net, veered off by wind and waves.

Casting about for some plan to rearrange the men so that he could take the skiff and row upstream to scare the fish in, he saw Vicki coming. It was almost as though he had called her!

She said in a low voice as she rowed alongside Shale's perch and smiled at him intimately, "I bet Gaffer thinks there isn't anything we can do! Shall I row upstream and scare them in? I've brought a pole and a rag."

Shale said, "That's mighty kind. Don't stay too long."

Vicki rowed a hundred feet up-tide above the head-buoys and as the jumpers marked the on-coming schools, she plunged the pole with a white rag wrapped at its end straight down into the water veering the fish toward the net.

She stayed at it all afternoon in spite of the cold driving rain which the gale brought. And Gaffer, who before she worked the trick had sworn that it was useless to fish, didn't even praise her for giving them a huge haul.

There was the day that one of the men couldn't be routed out of his drunken stupor. He had been to Deer Harbor the night before. And Vicki had volunteered to take his place.

"That is," she said, "if I can stand lookout for Shale."

"It's going to be a tough day," warned Shale. "This sou'wester'll drive fish right into the net. Hundreds of 'em. And the boats'll pitch. You sure can take it?"

Gaffer broke in: "Sure she can. And she'll make plenty of dough. I'll give her the drunk's share."

Shale faced him. "That'd be all right with me, Gaffer; but in American waters you have to hire a man at day wages and you can't split shares—unless the man who lays off agrees to it and says he will give his whole share."

Gaffer swore. "He's tryin' to gyp you, Vicki!"

"No," Vicki said quietly. "Shale is honest. He'd do what's right, even if he lost an arm."

Battling the skiff from the beach to the net, later, her words resounded in Shale's mind: "He'd do what is right—even if he lost—his girl!"

IT WAS tough. The big boats rolled sideways, plunging and throwing spray clear over Vicki and Gaffer on the lookout perches. But salmon were pouring in. And the crew were singing and shouting, aware that their noise would have no effect on the fish in this gale.

Once Vicki called to Shale: "There's six Kings going in. Do you want them? There may be a big school on their heels."

"No!" yelled Shale.

"Yes, haul!" ordered Gaffer. The men hauled.

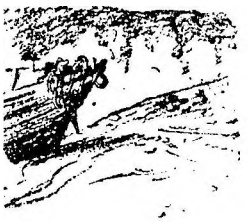
But the front of the net was hardly in the air when the channel halfway from the head-

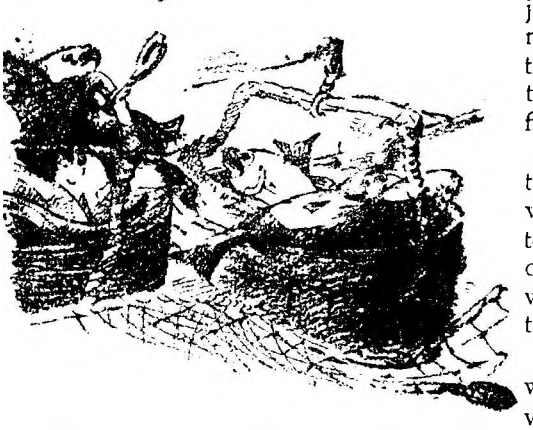
buoys to the net broke with salmon leaping and plunging. They'd been turned!

Gaffer stood on his perch staring at them. Shale yelled across: "I'm boss out here—you keep your damn mouth shut! We lost close to a hundred dollars that time."

The wind held strong. Before noon rain started. They were all soaked with sweat and spray. They shed their slickers—all but Gaffer and Vicki who had to wear the dark oilskins to keep from scaring the fish who might see them tossing about.

Vicki shouted, "Get ready, boys. It's a





whole slew of 'em! See 'em, Gaffer. God, there's a mob of 'em! Three hundred already—and still coming!" She leaned far out over the edge. "Watch for bubbles! We'll have to split 'em!"

Shale kept his eyes on the middle of the net, knowing that when the fish in the lead submerged he would have to give the signal even if the school had not all crossed the net's mouth.

He saw them—the thin streams of bubbles rising from the gills of the fish as they submerged; bubbles that rose in straight silver lines through the peacock green water.

"Bubbles! Haul!" he shouted. He saw deep in the bag of the net, the white bellies. He yelled, "They're turning!"

"Give her hell!" screamed Vicki.

The big reef-net boats dropped into the trough of a wave. The men held their net lines with both hands as the next wave lifted the boats. Then as they sunk into the following trough they forked in rope hand over hand with a speed only acquired by experience. They knew the trick of handling the big net in these huge waves.

"Quick!" shouted Vicki. "They're going to make a jump for it!" She clung to her pole with both arms, pulling as though trying to hold back the fish.

One great beautiful King salmon leaped clear, crossing the front of the net in a curve—the way salmon are pictured on fancy labels of canned fish.

Then a huge breaker lifted the boats and delayed the school. They couldn't jump the net when the wave passed for the men had raised its front three feet with the lift.

"Salmon in the bag!" shouted Vicki. She jumped from her perch and grabbed the nearest man and bear-hugged him. Together they did a jig on the narrow boat seat with the boat plunging under them and spray flying over them.

Twice during the day the men had to row to the fish-scow and unload. The total catch when finally the nets were stowed was fourteen hundred and twenty-six, the biggest catch at Cold Point in ten years! The weary water-soaked crew dragged themselves up the hill behind Gaffer and Vicki.

Shale hurried to catch up to Gaffer. This was the night to expect the Overflow—provided the warm rain had reached the snow-clad Selkirks. He must warn Gaffer!

Gaffer turned at his call. Vicki's face was white, from exhaustion. Gaffer lashed out at Shale, tauntingly: "You're a hell of a head-man, Kid Shale! You'd have my girl do all that fishin' for five bucks!"

Shale stiffened. "That's where you're wrong, damn you! I had sense enough to go and pour water on the drunk before we left camp. I got his okay to Vicki's fishin' in his place. She gets his share. You were the one tried to rob her—by not getting that settled for her yourself."

Then he called Gaffer a name he wouldn't have used if his nerves had not been ragged and his heart bitter at seeing Vicki so white and drawn.

He saw Gaffer lunge. He drove his fist into Gaffer's face, but he wasn't quick enough to miss the blow which the flat side of Gaffer's steel gaff clipped him over one ear. The world went black for him.

HE WAS in his tent. Someone had lit a fire in his camp stove. A lamp burned on his table of driftwood planks. There was no sound outside—the gale had blown itself out.

His face throbbed. He moved his hand to feel it and found his right ear and cheek covered with bandages. Someone moved in a chair behind him.

"You all right?" It was Vicki's mother.

"What time is it? Is that fog I see in the tent?"

"Yah—fog. She so t'ick you can't see to walk. She was midnight two hours ago—"

He started from his cot. "Gaffer didn't let Vicki go out to the fish scow—in this fog?"

The old woman chuckled. "Always you t'ink of my Veeki! Gaffer, he have not'in' to say 'bout it. Veeki, she mad like a shark loose an' floppin' on the deck! She swear at Gaffer: 'You kill him! You go quick—get a doctor!' Then she fix your face. And then she go to the scow—"

Shale lunged to his feet. "She's out there—"

"She be all right—she got warm clothes—she stay."

"My God, if the Overflow comes, she's in its path! And in this fog!" He jumped for his boots, forcing them on; grabbed his big Indian sweater and slicker.

"Quick—we've got to wake the men! I've got to row out and get her!" He dragged Vicki's sputtering mother through the solid fog to the tents, rousing the men.

"You—Bud!" he ordered, when he had gathered them. "Get to the phone at Darcy's. Phone the Coast Guard at Friday Harbor. Tell 'em the girl is out in this fog in a skiff, and a big Overflow coming!"

"How do you know?"

"Shut up! One of you row a line out and fish in the fog 'till you find the net boats. Cut the anchor lines and tow them in. The Overflow'll swamp 'em if you don't."

"What about the fish out in the scow?"

"Fish? To hell with the fish! Ma, you stay here till Gaffer comes. Tell him what he's done. Take a club and kill him if you want to! Good-by! Just one chance in a hundred you'll ever see Vicki or me alive again." He strode into the fog.

HE FIGURED that he had two hours. He rowed fast—the tide was flooding, the reef would be under water. The foghorn at Saturna Head was bellowing "B.O." He had to trust to it for his direction. He allowed fifteen minutes to reach the scow.

When his flash on his watch showed that he should be there he held his oars and shouted: "Vicki! Yoo-Hoo!"

The dead silence of the fog hit his solar plexus as though he had swallowed a hunk of oakum. As he listened he heard a muted whine, high up, to the south. Another gale coming!

Flood tide, south wind and most likely a terrific melting in the Selkirks the day before: it added up to a real Overflow. He shouted again in panic: "Vicki! V-i-c-k-i!"

The fog stirred against his hot face. A sudden gust swirled it. He threw the beam of his flash around the skiff. The fog was boiling like smoke from an old coal-burner's funnel.

The gale hit, sweeping fog before it. A sheet of rain pounded down. His flash reached farther now, between gusts of rain. But he could no longer hear the fog horn, eight miles north. Rain and adverse wind smothered it.

Suddenly he saw the old scow. Oh God! If only the fish were gone—that would show Vicki was safe on the tug with Black Matt. He raced to it. The big catch was still aboard!

He tied the skiff, jumped aboard and ran to the shelter in the scow's corner. It was empty—Vicki was gone!

All he could do now was wait—wait for dawn or for the gale to slacken enough to let him hear the fog horn. Without it to give him direction he'd be lost out on the water.

It was maddening, knowing that Vicki was somewhere in those mounting waves—knowing that neither of them could hear the Overflow until it was almost upon them. All he could do was keep shouting. And he shouted until he was hoarse.

The rain stopped at last but the gale rose. Light came. Now he knew his direction.

He dumped the skiff, struck out, west, glad at last to be able to do something—anything!

She would have rowed west, if she remembered. But wind and tide would have carried her north. To miss the Overflow, he must take a northwest course. Every few minutes he rested on his oars, shouted, then strained to listen.

Suddenly he heard it—the low storm-like roar, north of him. The Overflow!

He was not out of its path, after all! He raced due west once more. When he stopped to listen, the roar sounded above the gale and the pounding water. The east was brightening. He saw the black mass of the shore, and was amazed to see Cold Point and Needle Point almost south of him. The tide must have tricked him and carried him east.

He swung and pulled due west as hard as he could row.

The crest of the great torrent of muddy water swept past him, a hundred feet away. The eddy from it almost swamped his skiff. He could see the line—a huge wave that stretched to the shore. It was littered with drift and was advancing irresistibly against the tide. Uprooted trees rode it, their leaves still green. Huge cedar logs bobbed along on it.

And then he saw the skiff—far over, toward the center of the Overflow. Vicki was kneeling, bailing water. He saw her stop and seize an oar and scull frantically to escape from a twisting mass of logs.

Shale stood in his skiff, shouting, waving one oar. She did not hear. Across on Cold Point he could see figures lined on the cliff. He thought he saw smoke down the Channel—it might be the Coast Guard cutter.

He sculled at top speed, plowing into the muddy torrent at an angle, legs braced wide apart, his heart torn between joy and panic. Unless she swamped or a submerged log shot up from the maelstrom and wrecked his skiff, he knew he would reach her. He stole a swift glance down the channel, looking for the cutter. The fish scow had been there a minute before. Now it was gone. The crest of the Overflow had doubtless pulled the line tight, nosed the prow down and swamped the scow.

He saw Vicki's skiff lifted sidewise by a log and swamped. He yelled frantically.

She was swimming desperately to avoid roots and logs but she heard him. She fought to keep clear of drift until he sculled to her and backed the stern of his skiff to her so she could climb aboard.

She seized an oar to help and while she sculled he tossed his sweater to her. They stayed at opposite ends of the boat to have room to scull, also to keep it level.

The Overflow was carrying them straight toward Needle Point. Suddenly an eddy bore them east on that part of the torrent which swung along the base of the two hundred foot cliff at the edge of Cold Point Rock. Shale kept Vicki's back toward the Point. He didn't want her to see the logs piling up there on the rocks high in the air.

He felt weak. He wondered if he were losing his nerve. Then he saw the blood on his clothes and in the wash in the skiff. He felt his face: the bandages had soaked loose.

He thought how terrible he must appear to Vicki; then he realized what a dumb idea that was, when they both would so soon be battered to pulp.

Another eddy caught the skiff. They were so close that they could see Vicki's mother on the cliff wringing her hands in her apron, her face tortured. The skiff swung in a dizzying circle. Shale knelt in the bottom and beckoned to Vicki.

Vicki had seen the churning mass at the base of the cliff. She dropped her oar and crawled to Shale, clinging to him.

Unpredictable as always, the Overflow tossed them aside, driving them on a huge swell, parallel to the cliff, out toward the channel. And Shale saw the swell, ahead of him, sucking through the gap between Cold Point and Needle Point.

He saw Gaffer, high on Needle Point, clinging to a rock. Gaffer had a rope. He must have plunged into the chasm between Cold Point and Needle Point carrying the end of the rope and hauled himself out of the raging water by hooking his gaff-hand to the rock ledges.

Men on Cold Point side held the other end of Gaffer's rope. And as the skiff plunged into the torrent racing between the two cliffs, Shale grabbed for their life-line and clung to it.

"Hang tight—even if we go under!" he warned Vicki. Her arms clutched his neck and she held there while Shale, hand over

hand pulled them sideways through the water.

Vicki's mother caught the girl to her. Shale turned and waited for Gaffer to make his way across the rope to safety.

As Gaffer came toward Shale, Vicki broke from her mother and ran back to Shale and stood at his side, taking his hand.

Gaffer looked at them. He smiled and came to Shale, holding out his good hand. "Well, Kid, your Overflow *is* something! But it's bad luck to me. I lost me a scow of fish—and a girl, too. You fished her out of the salt-chuck, so I guess you earned her."

Shale grinned. "There's more fish in the Sound, Gaffer." He drew Vicki into his arms. "But only one Vicki."

The Story Tellers' Circle

(*Continued from page 4*)

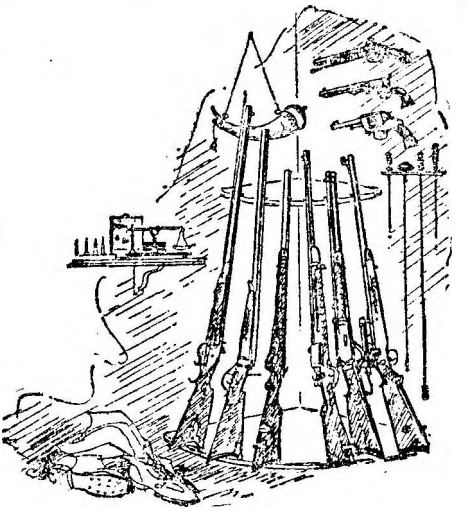
genuity, skill, and an ingrained habit of making things just a little better than the other fellow. Our shells were not made of cast iron like those manufactured in European countries. The casings were made of steel that was ribbed and grooved so that when they exploded the metal burst into thousands of pieces carrying potential death in each piece. The Germans didn't like American ammunition. What was to be done?

"Cablegrams crossed the Atlantic. The German Military Attache in New York was ordered to air his views on the delicate situation involving a neutral country. He did. His report revealed that American harbors were filled with transports loaded to the scuppers from our armament factories. So he cabled to his superiors: 'SOMETHING MUST BE DONE TO STOP IT.' And a high-ranking German general added in his own report: 'NOT ONLY MUST SOMETHING BE DONE, AS THE ATTACHE SAYS, SOMETHING MUST REALLY BE DONE.'

"There you have it. The combat forces complain. Political representatives make a report. And something is done about it. What? A German officer is picked from the German Admiralty. He is given forged identification papers, plenty of gold, put on a neutral ship and is sent to America.

"His mission is to destroy American shipping. He is no ordinary officer. He is a

(*Concluded on page 143*)



THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

Conducted by
PETE KUHLHOFF

A Modern Single Shot Rifle— and It's About Time!

IT SEEEMS almost certain that a fine single shot rifle will be produced and put on the market after we have won the war.

The action of this rifle evidently will be of the Sharps Borchardt type, made of the latest heat-treated steel and with several improvements. In other words, a completely modern single shot action. There is definitely a place for such a rifle in this country and I'm sure it will be quite popular.

I know that I can hardly wait until one of these actions (or rifles) comes my way as I have always maintained that the Sharps Borchardt action (as is) makes up into the almost perfect single-shot vermin, target or hunting rifle. (With practice the average shooter can fire a nicely designed single shot

rifle almost as fast as a repeater. If the shot is well placed a barrage is unnecessary.)

The Sharps Borchardt is an old action, being patented in December, 1876, but it was away ahead of its time. At that, it was evidently greatly appreciated by quite a number of discriminating shooters. This is indicated by the fact that a large percentage of these excellent guns were custom made. Now that I think of it I don't believe I have ever seen two of these rifles that were exactly alike, of course, excepting the .45-70 Military Rifle and Carbine.

Incidently, the price of these military guns, according to my catalog of 1878 was $20 for the rifle, or $22.50 with bayonet. The carbine sold for $16.50. Governments, states and Independent Military Organizations were given special prices.

The Long Range Sharps Borchardt Standard Rifle (weight about 10 pounds) was listed at $115 which included two vernier rear sights (one at the heel and the other at the grip). The same rifle to order with extra fancy Italian stock engraving and extra finish cost from $125 to $300. Believe me, these custom jobs were beautifully decorative, and besides engraving, there were panels of wood and other material inlet into the steel sides of the action. These guns are greatly prized by collectors.

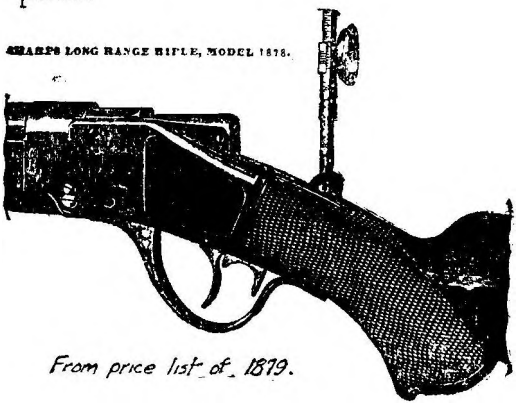
Unlike the side hammer Sharps, the Borchardt model was designed wholly for use with metallic cartridges. The action is quite compact and all parts are fitted so tightly that it is almost impossible for dirt or snow to get into the mechanism. It's as weather proof as any rifle I have ever used.

The main spring is of coil design and the firing pin moves but ¼ inch to strike the primer of the cartridge. A good point—the firing pin can be let down without snapping it. With the safety off (its just behind the trigger) and the action opened as far as it will go without the safety sliding back on, press the trigger and close the action, thus the firing pin will then be completely lowered without engaging the sear. Naturally the firing pin shouldn't be lowered upon a live cartridge.

One fault in the Borchardt design is that the firing pin is retracted only as the breech block falls. So once in a while, the pin will catch in a soft primer and the action cannot be opened. Its a tricky job to release the

pin without breaking its tip but I understand this defect will be remedied in the new action. If you have ever had a pin stick and have had trouble getting it loose, you have no doubt done a lot of yanking and cussing, and have perhaps broken the pin. The action can be opened without much trouble by inserting a decapping plug of proper caliber into the barrel, pin foremost, and follow with a cleaning rod. Then push gently until the decapping pin enters the cartridge case flash-hole and rests against the fired primer or the nose of the firing pin. You will be able to feel the tension of the firing pin spring. By varying the depth of the decapping pin neither permitting the firing pin to lock into the primer pocket of the case nor pushing so hard that the decapping pin enters the breech block, you can slowly open the action.

In some cases, it has been found difficult to seat slightly oversize cartridges in the chamber. This lack of seating power is not important to the fellow who uses factory ammunition or to the reloader who resizes his cases. But nevertheless, the new action will be modified to give greater seating power.



From price list of 1879.

One important point in favor of the Borchardt action is the method used in mounting and securing the buttstock. The action has short tangs, and is held by a heavy bolt which passes through the small of the stock and extends well towards the butt.

The short tangs permit the use of a well designed pistol grip. I have never seen a Borchardt on which the buttstock had worked loose, which is indeed unusual with single shot rifles with two piece stocks (buttstock and forearm).

This old action is much coveted by the varmint shooter for building .22 and .25 caliber cartridge of high intensity. Incidentally, the most accurate 2 R Lovell (which as you know is one of the most accurate of all the .22 wildcats, and will no doubt be manufactured by the large ammo. companies after the war) that I know of is made up on an old Sharps Borchardt action.

Yep, the ideas of the Sharps people were quite advanced. They even recommended the use of round barrels above the octagonal ones which were in common use at that time —"In the interest of fine shooting, it is to be hoped that the octagon barrel will go out of fashion at an early date."

Here's another quote from the 1878 catalog which is just as true now as it was then— "A fine long-range rifle is a somewhat expensive toy, but one of our manufacture will last a lifetime, if properly cared for. After using, it should be thoroughly cleaned, *inside and outside*. It should then be thoroughly oiled *inside and outside*. Then the oil should be thoroughly rubbed off *inside and outside*. Use only fine gun or sperm oil. With these precautions, no trouble will be had from rust." (The italics are theirs.)

Any folks who have a Sharps Borchardt rifle and want complete dismounting instructions, drop me a note. I'll send 'em pronto!

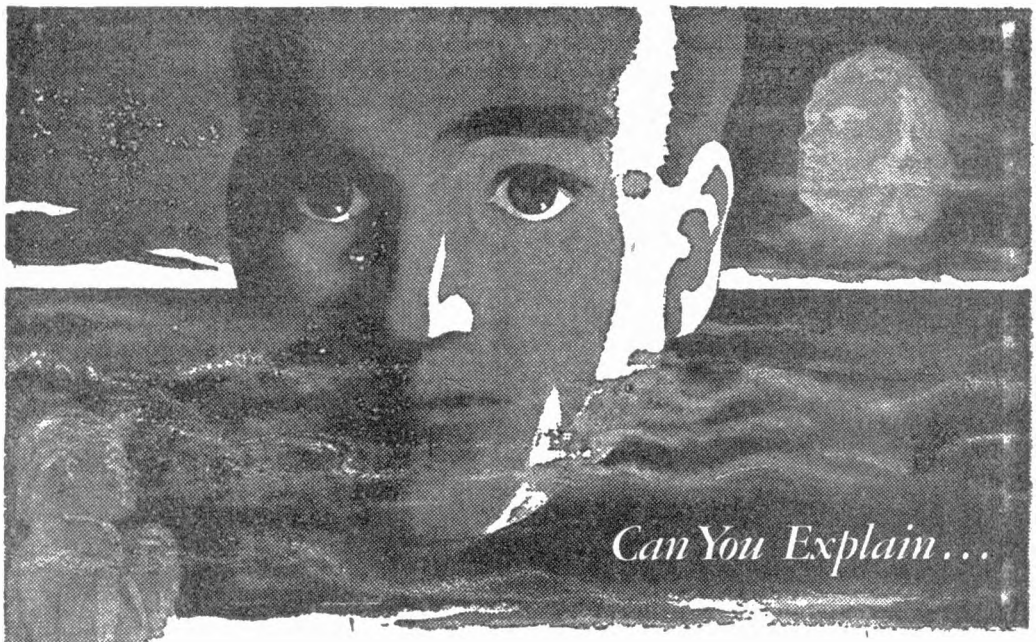
The Story Tellers' Circle

(*Concluded from page* 139)

man of intelligence and breeding, and systematic cunning.

"That his mission failed was no fault of his, nor of his agents of destruction composed of fellow countrymen, German sympathizers and the dregs of malcontents, but rather because of blundering and carelessness of the Military Attache and his staff when they allowed the 'MOST SECRET CODE' to be taken from their office.

"There were many forms of sabotage used by this naval officer chief of which was the delayed-action bomb. The Germans never forgot this particular bomb. Did they in turn give it to the Japanese to use in the present war? Were the Japanese able to make use of it once they were evacuated from the Pacific Defense Zone? Impossible? 'No Evidence Needed' gives my answer to the perplexing question." *Robert H. Leitfred.*



Your Intuitive Impressions

ARE YOU EVER A HOST TO STRANGE IDEAS? Do amazing thoughts suddenly enter your mind in the still of night? Have you ever experienced a curtain seeming to rise in your mind and then, for the flash of a second—on the stage of your consciousness—is portrayed a dramatic event? Perhaps at such times you see yourself in a strange role surrounded by unknown personalities. Who has not awakened some morning with a partial recollection of a provoking dream which clings to the mind throughout the day? There are also times when we are inclined by an inexplicable feeling to cast off our obligations and to journey to a distant city or to visit a friend. Only sheer will prevents us from submitting to these urges. What do these intuitive impressions, these impelling *strange feelings* mean? Should we interpret these impressions as originating in an intelligence outside of us—or are they merely organic, the innate functioning of our own mental processes? Do not labor under superstition nor disregard what truly may be *Cosmic Guidance.* Learn the facts about these common experiences.

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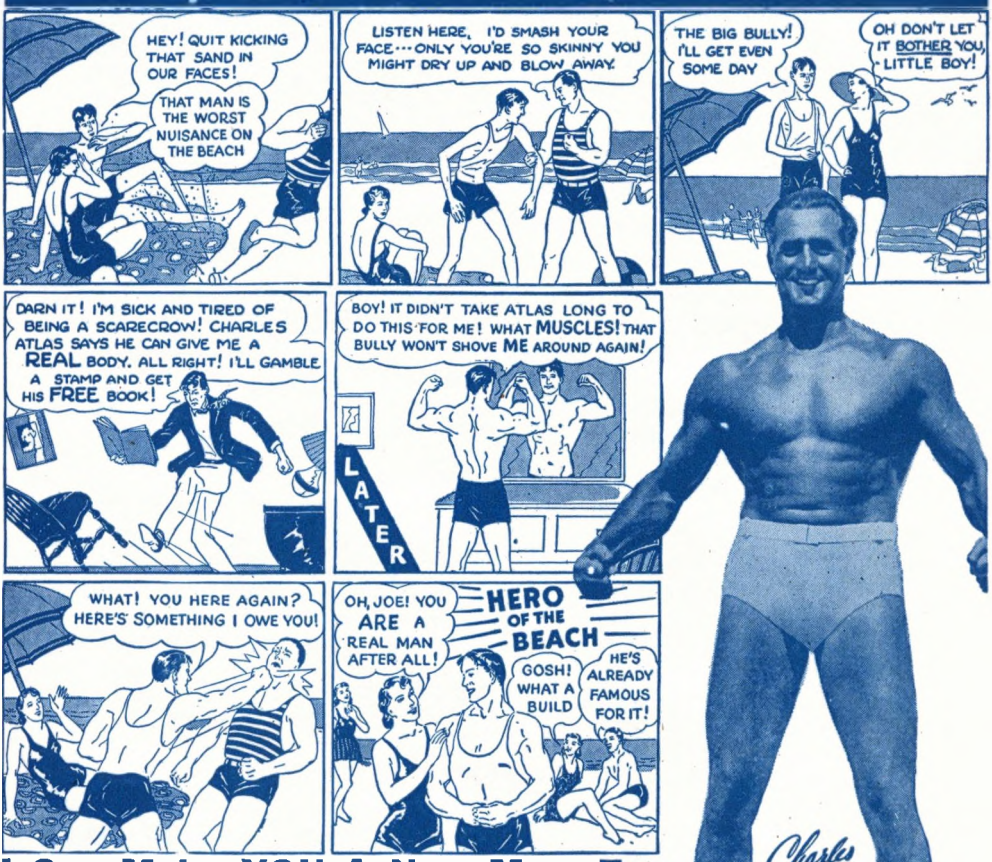
Address SCRIBE: Q. L. C.

The ROSICRUCIANS ✲ AMORC ✲ SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

HOW JOE'S BODY BROUGHT HIM FAME INSTEAD OF SHAME



—actual photo of the man who holds the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

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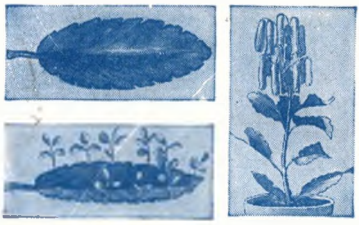

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