Exciting Adventures

Feb. 7

ARGOSY

10¢ Every Other Wednesday

Hitler's Secret Terror--

THE SPANISH UNDERGROUND

BORDEN CHASE

•

NORBERT DAVIS

FAY MCKENZIE
Republic Pictures Starlet

These may be the first signs that troublesome germs associated with a cold are attempting to invade the throat tissue and set up infection.

Quick action may ward off a cold or nip it in the bud if it is just starting. Begin gargling with Listerine Antiseptic at the first hint of trouble. Don't dilute it. Use full strength.

NOTE HOW LISTERINE GARGLE REDUCED GERMS

BEFORE

The drawings illustrate height of range in germ reductions on mouth and throat surfaces in test cases before and after gargling Listerine Antiseptic. Fifteen minutes after gargling, germ reductions up to 96.7% were noted; and even one hour after, germs were still reduced as much as 80%.

AFTER

Listerine reaches way back on throat surfaces to kill millions of the "secondary invaders." These bacteria, say many authorities, cause most of the distressing aspects of a cold.

For impressive evidence of Listerine's amazing power against the very germs associated with colds and accompanying sore throat read carefully the test data summarized in the panel above.

Test Results Showed:

FEWER COLDS and SORE THROATS for LISTERINE USERS

The above statement is one for you to remember the next time you feel a cold or simple sore throat coming on.

It is highly impressive when you realize that it reflects the results of carefully conducted tests during a ten year period of research.

First, these tests showed that those groups which gargled Listerine Antiseptic twice a day contracted fewer colds than the non-using groups.

Furthermore, these colds were milder and did not last as long as those of non-users of Listerine Antiseptic.

This success, we believe, must be due to the ability of Listerine Antiseptic to combat the troublesome bacteria which inhabit and multiply on mouth and throat surfaces . . . the very bacteria that many authorities say are responsible for most of the distressing aspects of a cold.

In other words, Listerine Antiseptic often seems to give Nature the helping hand she needs in combating such germs when fatigue, drafts, wet feet, or exposure have weakened body resistance so that germs find the tissue easier to attack.

Gargle Listerine Antiseptic systematically as a precaution against colds and as a first aid when you feel a cold or simple sore throat coming on. It may save you real trouble. Buy the large size economy bottle today and save money.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL CO., *St. Louis, Mo.*

WATCH YOUR THROAT
where illness often starts
LISTERINE THROAT LIGHT
GENUINE DU PONT "LUCITE" ILLUMINATOR
ONLY 75¢
Batteries Included

DO THE DEAD RETURN?

A strange man in Los Angeles, known as "The Voice of Two Worlds," tells of astonishing experiences in far-off and mysterious Tibet, often called the land of miracles by the few travelers permitted to visit it. Here he lived among the lamas, mystic priests of the temple. "In your previous lifetime," a very old lama told him, "you lived here, a lama in this temple. You and I were boys together. I lived on, but you died in youth, and were reborn in England. I have been expecting your return."

The young Englishman was amazed as he looked around the temple where he was believed to have lived and died. It seemed uncannily familiar, he appeared to know every nook and corner of it, yet—at least in this lifetime—he had never been there before. And mysterious was the set of circumstances that had brought him. Could it be a case of reincarnation, that strange belief of the East that souls return to earth again and again, living many lifetimes?

Because of their belief that he had formerly been a lama in the temple, the lamas welcomed the young man with open arms and taught him rare mysteries and long-hidden practices, closely guarded for three thousand years by the sages, which have enabled many to perform amazing feats. He says that the system often leads to almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind, can be used to achieve brilliant business and professional success as well as great happiness. The young man himself later became a noted explorer and geographer, a successful publisher of maps and atlases of the Far East, used throughout the world.

"There is in all men a sleeping giant of mindpower," he says. "When awakened, it can make man capable of surprising feats, from the prolonging of youth to success in many other worthy endeavors." The system is said by many to promote improvement in health; others tell of increased bodily strength, courage and poise.

"The time has come for this long-hidden system to be disclosed to the Western world," declares the author, and offers to send his amazing 9000 word treatise — which reveals many startling results — to sincere readers of this publication, free of cost or obligation. For your free copy, address the Institute of Mentalphysics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. 90L, Los Angeles, Calif. Readers are urged to write promptly, as only a limited number of the free treatises have been printed.

Advt.

ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 312 | CONTENTS FOR FEBRUARY 7, 1942 | Number 4

Looking Ahead!

WHY LEWIS HATES ROOSEVELT

A dramatic duel between two powerful personalities, what has been one of the most vital problems inside the nation, the battle between John L. Lewis and Franklin Roosevelt has shaken the security of the United States. What lies behind it? What are the reasons for Lewis' bitter hatred of the President? Argosy answers these tremendous questions in a searching and authoritative article by

LAWRENCE STAFFORD

BRING 'EM BACK DEAD

McNally's in Manhattan. The jaunty specialist in wild beasts and wilder adventures has set out on a subway safari into the jungles of the big town; he's stalking certain savage specimens, and it means more jeopardy for him than he ever faced in the back country of Borneo. A fast and furious novelet by

RICHARD WORMSER

Coming in the February 21 Argosy—on sale January 21

This magazine is on sale every other Wednesday

A **RED STAR** *Magazine*

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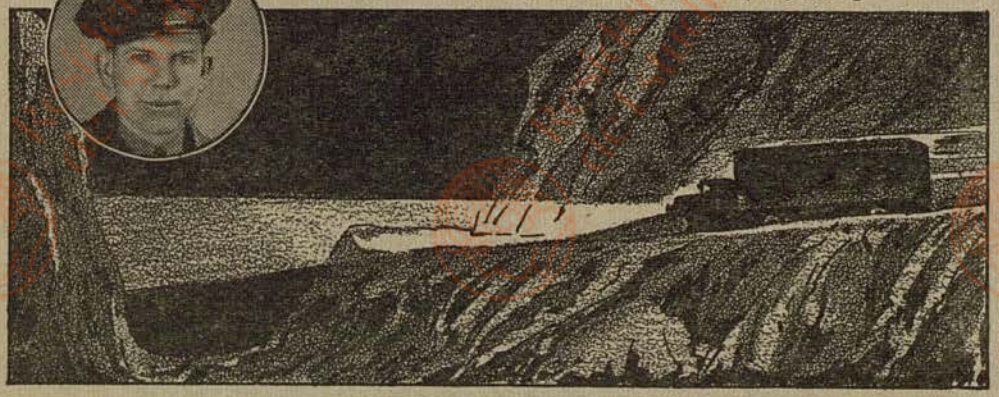
FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES . CRACK-SHOT WESTERN . DETECTIVE FICTION . DOUBLE DETECTIVE . ALL-STORY LOVE MAGAZINE . RAILROAD MAGAZINE . ALL-STAR LOVE . SECRET LOVE REVELATIONS . COWBOY MOVIE THRILLERS

"I RODE A JUGGERNAUT DOWN A CHUTE-THE-CHUTE!"

A true experience of L. S. VANDIVER, *Laramie, Wyoming*



"A WINDING RIBBON of glassy ice faced me as I nosed my big Diesel truck down Telephone Canyon, near Laramie, Wyoming, one dark winter night," writes Mr. Vandiver. "Behind me, on a twenty-eight foot trailer, rode 27,000 pounds of freight.

"WITHOUT WARNING, the lights went out! It was six miles to the bottom of the canyon . . . my left wheels were skirting a precipice . . . and those tons in back of me were shoving—and I mean *shoving*. It would have been suicide to use my brakes.

"I WAS SKIDDING TOWARDS ETERNITY when I remembered my flashlight. Its bright beam flooded the road ahead. Thanks to 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries, I drove the six miles safely, saving not only my life, but the $12,000 truck and its 13½ ton cargo.

(*Signed*) *L. S. Vandiver*"

The word "Eveready" is a registered trade-mark of National Carbon Company, Inc.

FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER... *Look for the* DATE-LINE

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC., 30 EAST 42nd STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

Unit of Union Carbide and Carbon Corporation

UCC

Spain

As told by Josef Forman to Robert Carse

Spain lies in agony, robbed of her produce and her liberty by Hitler's two puppets—Franco and Mussolini. But Spain is not crushed; she still fights, secretly and underground, and so fiercely that her conquerors tremble

JOSEF FORMAN was one of the men who helped Masaryk build the first Czech Republic. During the present war he served at the Czech Legation in Paris and the Czech consulate in Marseille. He is now in the U. S. A. with the Czechoslovak Foreign Mission.

In his first article Mr. Forman told the story of Zahor Topol, a professor at the University of Prague, who saw his country conquered by the Nazis and his wife shot down in flight. Aided by the efficient underground movement, Zahor Topol made his escape into Poland; there he received further assistance from a chief of the Polish underground named Vladek Maszyn.

Mr. Forman's second article described Vladek Maszyn's fight against the conquerors of his homeland. Because Maszyn was responsible for the slaughter of an entire Nazi garrison, he became a marked man, and he was eventually captured by the Gestapo.

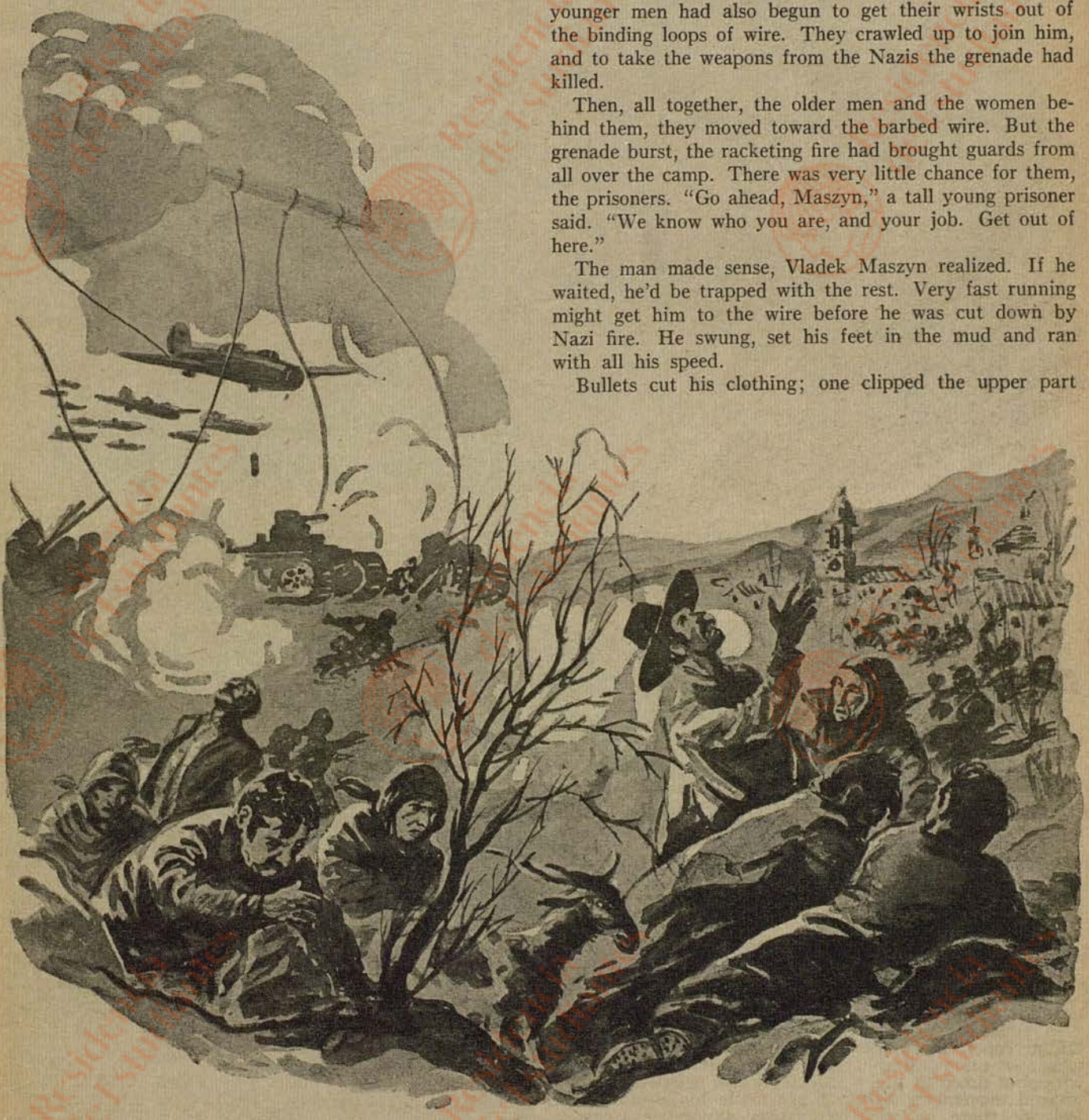
The Nazi guards forced him and the others sentenced to die to dig their own grave; then, wired together in the pit, the prisoners awaited the thrown grenade that would carry out their execution so efficiently. But Maszyn managed to get his hands free; he caught the grenade as it arched down upon the prisoners. . . .

VLADEK MASZYN took a tighter grip on the grenade. He threw it with an upward, quick motion. The Polish people who stood around him in the grave groaned in sudden, huge relief. Then there was the rocking crash of the explosion, the whistling and slapping of the steel fragments, and the cries of the wounded and dying Nazi guards.

Maszyn got his other wrist loose from the wire that bound him. He leaped up onto the edge of the grave, bent to save himself from any fire from the guards. But

Hitler's Secret Terror

Hitler Murders Nations (III)



the grenade had struck very close to them, he saw; all four of them were either dying or dead. The Spandau gunner sprawled right at his feet, and he took the gun from the man.

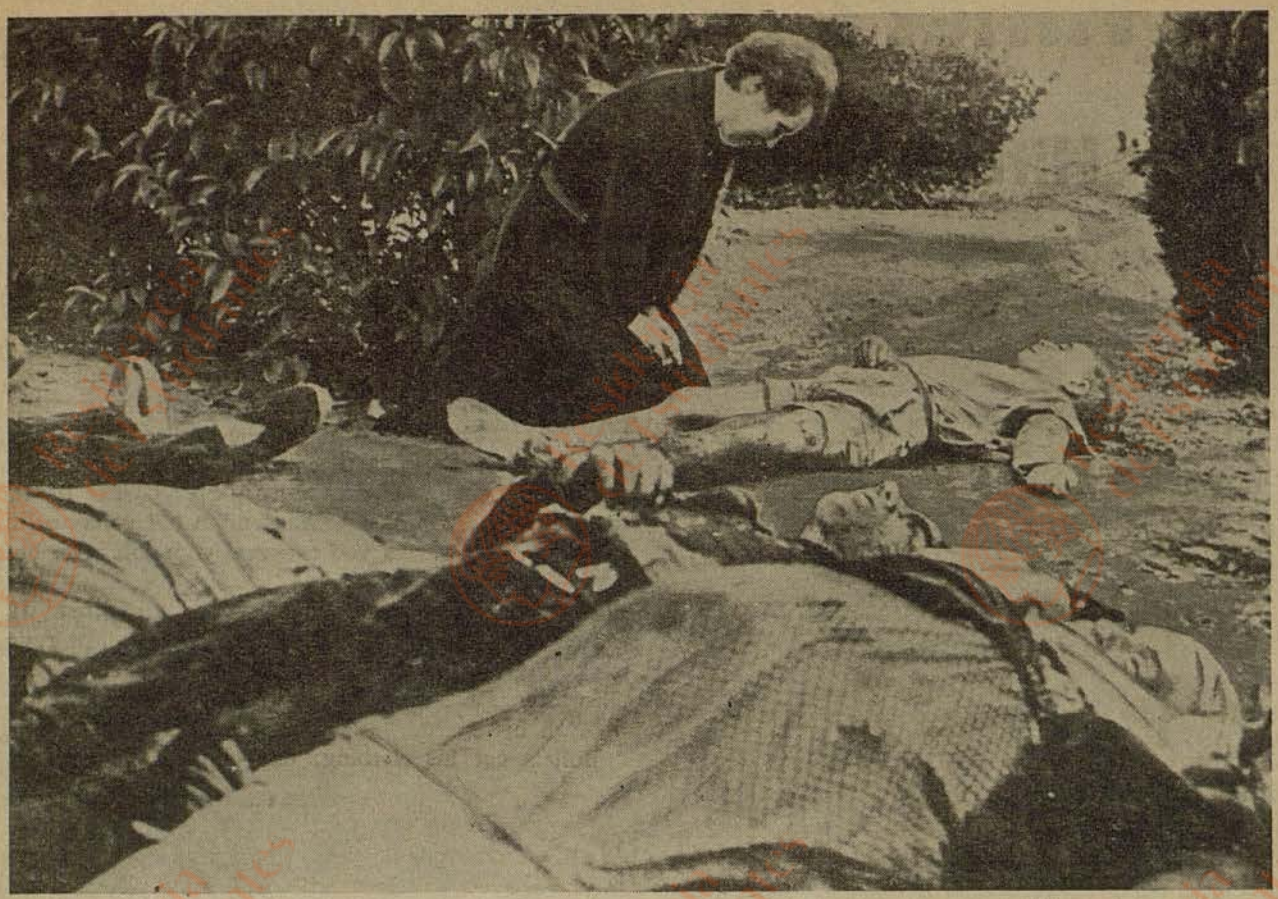
Guards were running across the muddy ground of the prison camp compound. He knelt and threw a burst from the Spandau into them. Then he glanced at the people with whom he had been supposed to die. Some of the younger men had also begun to get their wrists out of the binding loops of wire. They crawled up to join him, and to take the weapons from the Nazis the grenade had killed.

Then, all together, the older men and the women behind them, they moved toward the barbed wire. But the grenade burst, the racketing fire had brought guards from all over the camp. There was very little chance for them, the prisoners. "Go ahead, Maszyn," a tall young prisoner said. "We know who you are, and your job. Get out of here."

The man made sense, Vladek Maszyn realized. If he waited, he'd be trapped with the rest. Very fast running might get him to the wire before he was cut down by Nazi fire. He swung, set his feet in the mud and ran with all his speed.

Bullets cut his clothing; one clipped the upper part of the lobe of his right ear; but he made the wire, crawled under it and past it into the woods beyond. Nazi guards chased him, but there weren't many, as most of them fought the prisoners back inside the wire.

Vladek Maszyn got away from the guards, and he was safe by the time darkness came. He walked steadily during the night, going only to peasant huts that were known to him in the region. Then, meeting with a group of the



Photographs by special arrangement

A prayer for the soldiers of freedom. These men were killed during the retreat from Figueras in January of 1940

leaders of the *Wolnosc,* he planned his escape from Poland. There was nothing more he could do here in his own country, they decided. He was too well known to the Gestapo. But there was work for him outside; there would always be work until the Nazis were conquered.

Along the devious routes of the underground, hiding in barns, city tenements, freight yards and twice right in Nazi barracks, he passed the border near Sniatyn and came out into Roumania down the Prut River. He rested for a few days in Cernauti, then was sent on, supplied with funds by the *Wolnosc,* and told to reach Western Europe as soon as possible.

THAT city of Lisbon, high up above the rapid, ocher Tagus, held a quality of subdued violence and tragedy. Portugal was at peace in March of 1940, but here was the last gateway to the American continents. Here was where the hunted and homeless from half of Europe hid in fear of Fascism. Gestapo agents watchfully walked the broad streets in the sun, sat in all the hotel lobbies.

During his weeks in Lisbon, Zahor Topol had got to know the Gestapo agents. He was safe after his slow and zigzag journey up the Mediterranean. The Nazis couldn't touch him; his papers were in order, and as soon as money came from friends in the United States he would be on his way to join the Czechoslovak Army in France. But the hours slowly passed, and there was little for a poor man to do except sit at a café table on the big plaza the local folk called the Rocio and read the papers, gaze at the crowds.

He could tell now which ones were fugitives from Fascism. The pain of the torture was so deep in the roots of his being that a psychic sense informed him. They walked like other people, the fugitives, and they smiled and laughed and occasionally they were gay, but they kept looking behind them, and they never stood for long where it was impossible for them to get quickly away.

He recognized the Spanish boy in such a fashion. The boy came along the Rocio shuffling in a pair of ragged rope-soled sandals. His face was gaunt with hunger, his eyes staring, and his clothes thin, stained cotton. He stopped beside a palm tree across the sidewalk from Zahor Topol and looked back.

Two Gestapo agents were moving through the crowd. They walked in stride, and with purpose. The boy crossed the sidewalk, started into the café. The waiters in there might let him stay, Zahor thought, but not the owner. He touched the boy lightly on the arm as he passed and said in a soft voice, "Sit down and have a chocolate."

"*Muchas gracias,*" the boy said, and instantly sat. He took Zahor's paper, lifted it until the Gestapo were gone on around the Rocio. Then he said, "Thank you for that."

"I don't like them, the Gestapo," Zahor said. "They seemed about to bother you."

"You know them?" the boy said.

"Yes, I know them."

They were silent then as the waiter brought the chocolate.

"I'm Spanish," the boy said, holding his hand beneath the table to Zahor Topol. "My name's Garciá Nunez, and I come from Brihuega."

"I'm named Zahor Topol," the man said. "Czechoslovakia's my country, Prague my city. But I know only a little Spanish. Do you speak French?"

Garciá Nunez grinned up over the chocolate cup. "My father taught at the *Casa del Pueblo* at home. He made me learn French."

"Where's your father?"

"Dead, in the defense of Madrid. My mother was killed later—when the Italians came through our town."

Zahor Topol simply said, "My wife was killed by the Nazis. I've fought against them. But, how old are you, and what are you doing here?"

"My age is fourteen," Garciá Nunez said. "Let's walk down by the river, and I'll tell you why I'm here."

It all came back in clear detail to Garciá Nunez as he told it to the quiet-faced Czech.

THERE hadn't been much of a wheat crop the first year after the war, because around Brihuega the fighting had scarred and fouled the soil. But then agents of the Franco government and women from the *Auxilio Social* came out from Madrid and gave the people seed to plant. A big crop of wheat was badly needed, they said.

The peasants where Garciá Nunez lived outside Brihuega did well enough, but they had done a lot better in the days of the Republic, and over at Guadalajara they knew thousands of acres lay fallow. That fallow land belonged to some of the big, wealthy landlords who stayed in Madrid, didn't care about their crops. Franco had crushed the Agrarian Reform when he came into power; he had given the landlords title once more to their land, and they hired it out for a profit and the rest didn't matter to them.

The best of the crop came ripe in July. There was a lot of starvation in the town; babies and small children cried at night for want of food. The people had gone out every day to the fields to watch the wheat. They were ready days ahead for the harvesting.

Carabineros and Fascist troops, Italians in shabby gray-green uniforms, lined the roads beside the fields as the people worked. The people stared at them, busy with the reaping, but nothing was wrong with the wheat, it would make good bread.

But then as the waiting trucks were loaded with the wheat, the people began to understand. None of the wheat was for them, not one bushel. The trucks, driven by Italian soldiers and guarded by more soldiers and *carabineros*, went straight to the railroad line. The wheat was to be sent to Germany, to pay for Franco's war.

Some of the women who were mothers of young children became insane with rage and despair. They leaped at the trucks, tried to stop them. *Carabineros* standing on the running boards booted them back. One of them fell under the wheels and was killed. Another had her lips torn by a boot heel.

The peasants still had their flails and scythes. They charged the line of trucks. Garciá Nunez was with those men. He ducked down into the rubble of the nearest field after their leaders were shot dead. It was time to get out of here, he told himself. But it was also time to keep the wheat train from going to Germany.

The Germans desperately needed that wheat, Garciá realized. They needed it so badly that they must be secretly afraid—fearful that Spain would break free from the Fascist grip. So anything that increased their fear would be valuable.

Garciá didn't talk to any of the men when he slipped away, for none of them left knew about the dynamite and detonating apparatus. It had been hidden over in the woods at the end of the war, and he'd been with the guerillas when they put it there. The *teniente* in command of the guerilla band had said the stuff was to be

Here is Franco's service to Spain—90,000 men killed between February and May of 1940

Photographs by special arrangement

kept for the right time. Well, here it was right enough.

Garciá Nunez had accompanied the guerillas on a couple of raids during the war. He was sure he could handle the apparatus without help, and anyhow if he was captured, he'd be the only one to get the torture.

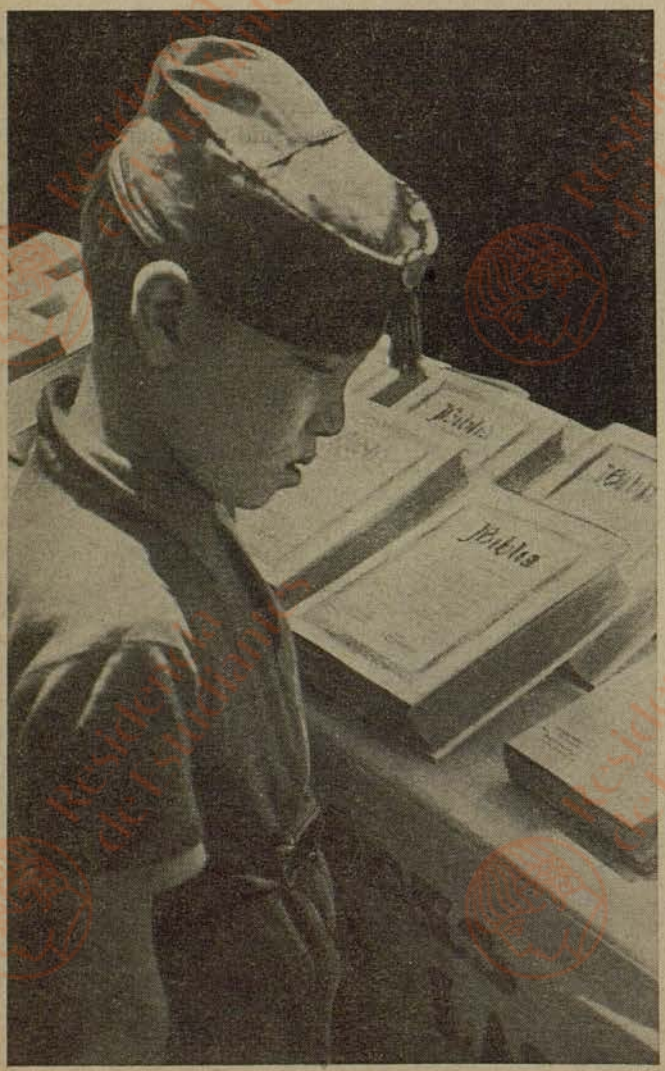
The train with the wheat was being made up at Guadalajara. It would be pulling out north for the French border pretty soon, because the Fascist garrison commander wouldn't want it around the town. But the commander would surely send out a patrol to look over the line before the train went through. He'd have to very careful, Garciá Nunez thought, to catch the train.

HE FOUND the stuff without any trouble at the end of a wooded gully through which the railroad line ran. The dynamite and wire and apparatus were in good shape, but the battery was weak and he wasn't certain it would fire.

He learned, too, that he'd forgotten that the guerillas had left nothing but one old single-barrel shotgun, and only one shell for that. But he placed a load of all the dynamite, about forty sticks, under the tracks right at the middle of the grade leading into the gully.

He led his detonating wires back and fixed them so he could explode the charge well hidden from sight high up in an oak tree. Several times as he waited there in the tree he almost decided to get down and run, not to try to pull the job. But then he recalled how hungry he was, and how his father and mother had died. The Fascists had killed his parents. They'd kill him, starve him to death, unless he did something about it. "So stay here, Garciá," he whispered aloud. "Give them a little more to frighten them."

Before Franco conquered. This scene could not happen today, for Franco has confiscated the Bible in Spain



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Photographs by special arrangement

Thousands of Spanish refugees, wounded and starving, were thrown into French concentration camps

The Italians in their shabby gray-green uniforms came cautiously up the track, first a tall sergeant with a Breda automatic rifle, a section of twenty men behind the sergeant, then an open space, then the lieutenant in command and the other section.

Garciá Nunez was sweating, and his heart sounded very loud in his ears, louder than the engine hauling the train into the foot of the grade. Since the end of the war, there hadn't been any more English coal for the engines, and this one didn't haul very well, steam leaking from the cylinder heads.

"*Eccoci!*" the Italian lieutenant called to his men, and they got off the tracks, stood alongside as the train came up the grade.

Garciá Nunez waited until the engine was squarely over the dynamite. Then he twisted the detonator.

The engine vaulted over into the gully with a great cracking sound. Pieces of the track buckling upward from the spreader plates struck the lieutenant and a number of the men. Some of the cars yanked loose from their couplings, tilted and slung wheat yellow and bright down beside the tracks.

Garciá was surprised. He'd done just as well as the guerillas. He'd wrecked a train, all by himself. Now what he had to do was sit here and take it easy, wait for his chance to slip down and away.

But the big Italian sergeant who had led the first section was coming through the gully toward him. The sergeant was following the detonating wires, and they'd bring him here, right to the tree. Garciá swore beneath his breath and braced himself and got the old shotgun ready.

The sergeant halted underneath the tree. Most of Garciá's ability to stay calm had left him, and he was shaking when he pulled the shotgun trigger.

The slug smacked the soil past the sergeant. He swung, and brought the muzzle of his gun on Garciá Nunez. "Come down," the sergeant said. "Where's the rest of your people?"

"There's only me," Garciá Nunez said. He slid slowly to the ground, put his hands above his head. It was strange that the sergeant didn't shoot him, but they said that some of the Italian soldiers were good men, and maybe this was one of them.

"Why did you do it?" the sergeant said.

Garciá Nunez said, "My folks are dead. I'm starving. Today you cheated us out of all our winter wheat. There won't be any bread, and there'll be famine."

"Come on!" the sergeant said, and jerked him by the arm. "You've killed a lot of men, derailed a train. You'll have to go to the Falangist police. They won't feed you."

"No," Garciá Nunez said, getting really frightened now, and sick to his stomach, "I guess they won't. . . ."

THE Falangist police were all local Fascists who knew his father's and mother's record from the war. They gave him a very severe beating. Then they pitched him into a corner of the guardroom. "You'll have to go to Madrid," they said. "The Gestapo will sweat some more out of you."

He was half conscious, and it was hard for him to understand them. But he knew that the kind of choking, sobbed wail he'd heard had been his own, and that he should keep still, make no sound.

He was put in a truck with seven other men and women prisoners at dawn and sent down to Madrid. The sergeant who had captured him was in command of the truck. The sergeant said, "You sit in front with me, Nunez."

Garciá Nunez sat very still. He kept watching the big Italian non-com. This man puzzled him.

"Can you walk?" the sergeant finally said to him in a low voice as the truck rattled over the road.

"To escape, yes," Garciá Nunez said.

"How far would you have to go to be safe?"

"Not far. But don't think I'd tell you."

The sergeant glanced sidewise at the driver, then back at him. "I'm your friend, *chico*. Last night I was where I couldn't help hearing them beat you. I've got a cousin, Vittorio, about your age back home. When they knocked you around, I began to think about him, and all this rotten stuff they call *Fascismo*.

"I used to be a clerk in Naples, and I had a good job until Mussolini's *squadristi* walked in and took over the whole office. Then, when I was starving, I volunteered, but for pioneer duty in Abyssinia, not for combat duty in Spain. I was at Guadalajara the time your folks knocked the hell out of us."

"We surely did," Garciá Nunez said. "But what are you trying to prove?"

"I got a letter from my mother this morning," the sergeant said. He motioned toward the driver of the truck. "He got the same sort of news. Our folks are starving at home, too. There's no more spaghetti being made, no olive oil. Vittorio's sick, and my younger brother just died from the wounds he got in Abyssinia."

The sergeant took out a pistol in the dull dawn light. He slid it into Garciá Nunez's hand. "Does that convince you?" he said.

"Si, hombre!" Garciá said. He pulled back the pistol slide to finger the cartridges in the clip.

"Who'll take care of you if you get away?" the sergeant said. "The driver's a guy like me, but the soldiers in the back of the truck aren't the same at all."

"People in Madrid will help me," Garciá Nunez said. He was looking ahead at the city in the dawn, remembering that his father and thousands of others had died in its defense. The Telefonica building stood tall against the sky above the mist. It was out past the Telefonica, along the Manzanares and the Casa del Campo and the Parque Oeste, that the people had fought to save Madrid.

HE SHIFTED the pistol, trying the balance in his hand. For almost three years the people had held Madrid. Now, through treachery, it was Franco's, and half a million people rotted in his prisons and concentration camps. "Where are you supposed to take us?" he asked the sergeant.

"Carcel Modelo," the sergeant said.

"You know the city better than I do," Garciá Nunez said. "I've only been here a couple of times. Where will we go along a trolley line?"

"On the Moncloa."

"Will the cars be crowded this time of day?"

"Jammed full with men going to work from the suburbs. But what are you figuring, *chico*?"

"To get a trolley car load of workers to help us," Garciá said. He turned, squinted through the window of the truck cab at the soldiers who rode jolting in back with the prisoners. They were hard-faced men, held their rifles slung at the ready from the shoulder. There were six of them, and once things started he wouldn't count much on the sergeant or the driver. What he'd count on would be the people of Madrid.

Very few trolley cars ran these days, the big Italian sergeant explained to him as the truck crossed the Moncloa. The Fascists lacked fuel and trained workers and spare parts for the city power plant. But more than that they were afraid of sabotage. "*La Quinta Columna* afraid," Garciá Nunez said, and grinned. Then he saw the street car ahead.

It was so overloaded that it swayed from side to side. Men stood tight against each other, standing up between the seats. Other men, dozens of them, hung on the roof and on the rails like vast clusters of human grapes. They were nearly all working men, dressed in faded denims and cheap cotton sandals. He tried the pistol balance again, just to make sure. "Stop beside the trolley," he told the driver, and thrust the pistol barrel back through the cab window of the truck.

He fired at the Italian guards before they knew what he was doing. But some of the prisoners were in his way and he wasn't a good shot with a pistol. The guards unslung their rifles, began to shoot back. Then the truck stopped.

Garciá Nunez took a deep breath. He waved the pistol so the man hanging on the trolley car could see it. "To hell with Franco!" he yelled. "Up, the Republic!"

They came jumping off the trolley car in threes and fours and half dozens. Two men sprang from the car roof right into the body of the truck. They killed the guards with their hands and feet, crushed them to death.

Police whistles were blowing across the Concloa. *Carabineros* in shiny hats were running with Mausers at their hips. But the men who had been on the street car ran in every direction. They took Garciá Nunez and the other prisoners with them from the truck.

It was good to be back in Madrid, Garciá Nunez thought, then tried to tell the man who carried him to put him down. But his voice was a weak whisper, and the pain of last night's beating had returned, and he fainted there in the shadowy, winding alley where the men now ran.

HE SAW a great deal of Spain after that, for the newly formed and growing underground movement took him as a charge, sent him on his path of escape. Seeing the efficiency of the underground, Garciá understood why the Gestapo was so active and so ruthless. The Germans were afraid of a rebellion that would lose them Spain. Yes, Hitler was afraid of a starving people. . . .

Four different sorts of police sought him, and in their order of power and skill they were the Gestapo, the Italian OVRA, the Falangists and the carabineers. But the people who aided Garciá had power of their own, and they knew the country better than any police ever could.

After a few days in Madrid, he spent weeks in the war-charred wreck of the Triana, the working class quarter across the Guadalquivir from Seville. Seville was a pest hole for the poor. They suffered from tuberculosis, pellagro, scurvy and endemic dysentery. The narrow streets rang at night with the crying of hungry children, the racked coughs of the dying.

But in a cellar in the Triana a little hand press ran, and it printed the truth for the people of Spain. It told of a ship full of Spanish oranges bound for Hamburg that had sunk leaving Alicante harbour. It recited accident after accident on the mountain highways of the Guadarrama where the wealthy of Madrid drove their high-speed cars. Moors of Franco's bodyguard were found strangled or stabbed to death and their commander requested that the outfit be returned to Africa.

Spain might be in agony, Garciá Nunez thought, but it was not beaten. It was fighting fiercely, and the oppressors knew that full well.

He went north and west, through Black Spain. Workers of the Rio Tinto mines cared for him. They told him of German engineers who had gone into the shafts, never to come out. Production was down fifty percent, the Germans figured, and the engineers had gone into the mines to find out why. "They learned," the miners said, unsmiling.

Then one night up at Jerez de los Caballeros he was almost trapped by a Fascist patrol. He ran for miles among the mountains, crossed through streams that pulled him with icy fury. The Fascists were fine shots. Their volleys followed him from rock to rock, but at last, crawling prone through laurel and scrub grass, he passed a small stone marker. He was over the frontier, in Portugal and out of Spain. . . .

Zahor Topol listened to him intently, motionless in his chair on the Rocio. This boy was just one more addition to the thousands of anti-Fascist fighters in Lisbon, he reflected, but Garciá Nunez was an excellent one. Zahor pointed along the Rocio to where at another cafe table a stocky, sun-brown man sat. "There's a Pole," he told Garciá," a man I met here a few days ago, who's got a story much like yours—and mine. Vladek Maszyn is his name. Come and meet him."

"*Bien sur,*" Garciá Nunez said. He and the Czech professor walked together towards the other man. But the Pole had risen to his feet. He was turning, staring, his face tense.

A newsboy had just come out into the Rocio. He carried a paper waving high above his head as he yelled. All the crowd there turned to listen to him. They were as quiet and as tense as Vladek Maszyn.

Another dramatic chapter in the "Hitler Murders Nations" series will appear in the next issue of Argosy.

Murder: Do Not Disturb

By Norbert Davis

Author of "Hang Him High," "Holocaust House," etc.

Welcome to the Mar Vista, where every guest is a millionaire, and even the law has been bought and paid for. You enjoy a gold-plated holiday here—but it's worth remembering that sometimes Death, too, takes a holiday

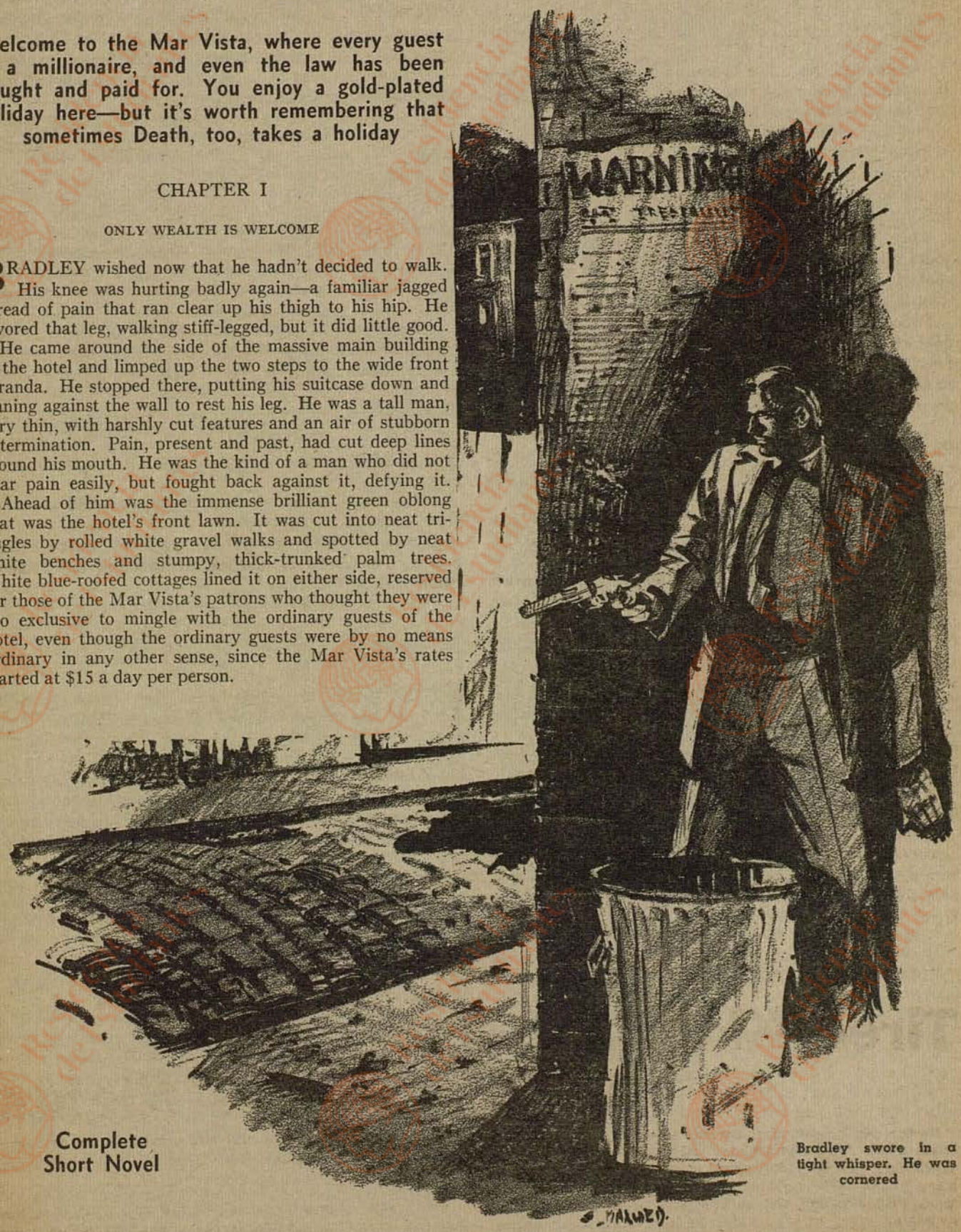
CHAPTER I

ONLY WEALTH IS WELCOME

BRADLEY wished now that he hadn't decided to walk. His knee was hurting badly again—a familiar jagged thread of pain that ran clear up his thigh to his hip. He favored that leg, walking stiff-legged, but it did little good.

He came around the side of the massive main building of the hotel and limped up the two steps to the wide front veranda. He stopped there, putting his suitcase down and leaning against the wall to rest his leg. He was a tall man, very thin, with harshly cut features and an air of stubborn determination. Pain, present and past, had cut deep lines around his mouth. He was the kind of a man who did not bear pain easily, but fought back against it, defying it.

Ahead of him was the immense brilliant green oblong that was the hotel's front lawn. It was cut into neat triangles by rolled white gravel walks and spotted by neat white benches and stumpy, thick-trunked palm trees. White blue-roofed cottages lined it on either side, reserved for those of the Mar Vista's patrons who thought they were too exclusive to mingle with the ordinary guests of the hotel, even though the ordinary guests were by no means ordinary in any other sense, since the Mar Vista's rates started at $15 a day per person.



Bradley swore in a tight whisper. He was cornered

Complete Short Novel

On beyond the lawn was a strip of white sand and beyond that the incredible metallic blue of the Pacific stretched endlessly to meet the horizon.

The breeze was cool and soothing, and Bradley took his hat off and wiped his sweaty face with his handkerchief. From farther along the porch toward the entrance of the hotel, a girl's voice said:

"Isn't it beautiful? I've seen it thousands of times, but on a day like this it can still take my breath away."

"It's all right, no doubt, if you like that sort of thing, but personally I prefer my beauty in a little different form. And referring to forms, my dear, I've been meaning to speak to you about yours."

Bradley knew that second voice. He hadn't heard it for a long time, but it had a mocking lilt in it that was unmistakable. He moved away from the wall.

The girl said: "I doubt if you can tell me anything I haven't heard before."

"Indeed I can," said the man with her. "When it comes to a woman's beauty, I have a gift of words that makes me sound like a beautiful tone poem played in the silvery soft light of the moon . . ."

He saw Bradley, and his voice trailed away into silence.

HE was a tall man, very debonair and erect, with brightly intense blue eyes and close-cropped reddish hair. He was wearing slacks and a sport coat and a white silk scarf. He was smiling, and the smile grew a little stiff on his lips as he stared at Bradley, but he gave no other sign of the emotion he must have been feeling.

"My dear," he said slowly after a moment, "have you ever seen any ghosts gamboling about this exclusive establishment?"

"Ghosts?" the girl repeated. She was wearing only a white satin bathing suit and white thick-soled bathing clogs. She had a tanned, beautifully lithe body. Her hair was golden blonde and the ends of it, curled under, just touched her bare shoulders when she turned her head.

"Ghosts," the man said. "I was hoping they made a habit of dropping around here now and then, because if I'm not looking at a ghost—"

"You're not," said Bradley.

The man sighed. "I was afraid of that. Don't go away, my dear. Bradley is a gentleman. He wouldn't shoot me down in cold blood in front of you."

"Shoot you?" the girl said. She turned to look at Bradley. "What are you talking about? Are you crazy?"

"That's it!" said the man. "Did you hear her, Bradley? I'm not responsible for my actions. I'm just a poor maniac."

Both his words and his tone were bantering, but there was something in his face that was not, and the girl suddenly backed away from him. She stared from one man to the other with wide, frightened eyes.

It was still on the porch, and the shadows seemed suddenly dark and cold.

Bradley said slowly: "That was a long ways away from here and a long time ago, as things go nowadays. I suppose it's best to forget it, O'Riley."

"Ah!" said O'Riley, blowing out his breath in sudden heartfelt relief. "You're got a nasty way of looking at a man, Bradley. I don't mind telling you I've waked up in a cold sweat a good many nights thinking that sometime I might meet you just like I did today if those Jap bombs hadn't finished you."

"Bombs?" said the girl. "What *are* you two talking about?"

"PARDON me, my dear," O'Riley said. "This is Dave Bradley, who comes from I-don't-know-where and is probably on his way to some place just as strange. Bradley, this beautiful little lady is Miss Ellen Grey."

"How do you do," said Bradley.

The girl nodded absently, staring at O'Riley. "Why—why, you were really frightened!"

"Frightened?" O'Riley said mockingly. "That's an understatement, I assure you. I was as scared as a man can be and still stand up."

"Of him?" she asked, turning to look at Bradley in an incredulous way.

"Don't let him fool you, Ellen dear," O'Riley warned her. "He looks somewhat like a deacon, to be sure, but he's a cold desperate man, and he'd think no more of cutting my throat than you would of winking your pretty eyes."

"But why?" Ellen asked, plainly unbelieving.

"Ah, now as to that," O'Riley answered vaguely. "I did something that irritated him."

Ellen turned to Bradley. "What did he do?"

"We were working for the Chinese Republican Government," Bradley said. "I was building planes for them. O'Riley was a flyer. He deserted to the Japanese and sold them a map on which the location of my factory was very carefully marked and plotted. The factory was well hidden. They'd never been able to locate it before."

"Did you do that?" Ellen demanded of O'Riley.

"Oh, yes," he admitted casually. "How did you get out of it, Bradley? The Jap bombers reported that there was nothing left of the place but a pile of rubbish when they got through."

Bradley smiled grimly. "You didn't think I trusted you, did you? When you didn't report on time, I moved all the men and machinery out of the factory. The Japs blew up an empty building."

O'Riley nodded at Ellen. "Do you see? He puts no faith in human nature at all."

Ellen said. "Why—why, it's nothing to joke about! Selling your comrades for money, that's what you did! He *should* have shot you!"

"Yes," O'Riley agreed. "I'm nothing but a scoundrel. I can't help it. It was born in me." He was watching Bradley narrowly. "You had a crack-up, didn't you?"

"Yes. Smashed my leg. Testing bombers in Canada."

ELLEN was looking at his dusty shoes. "Did you walk from San Benito? There's always a limousine from the hotel waiting at the railroad station."

"I came down from Vancouver by bus. There was no limousine at the bus stop."

"No," O'Riley said thoughtfully. "The patrons of the Mar Vista don't use buses much. They go in for private railway cars and airplanes and yachts and limousines. The prices are on the steep side here, my lad."

Bradley smiled. "I'm not paying them. Courtney, the owner of the place, is a Canadian. He met me when I was laid up in the hospital in Vancouver and invited me to come down here and stay a while free."

"Ah!" said O'Riley. "So he's a friend of yours, eh? You might mention my name to him. They've been getting a bit on the rough side over my bill lately."

Ellen stared at him in indignant amazement. "Well, I must say you have your nerve! After what you did to him! Selling him out! Trying to get him killed!"

"Such a fierce little lady, she is!" O'Riley mocked her. He looked at Bradley, and the insolent glaze of his self-assurance cracked for the first time. "I've been sorry about that deal for a long time, Bradley, although it's no good saying so now. But I needed money, and there's not much I won't do for that."

Bradley said slowly: "A lot of people have tried to kill me in the last few years for one reason and another. After awhile it gets so that one attempt more or less doesn't seem to make much difference."

"It does that," O'Riley said, his face drawn and grim. "Ah, but it's a fine, lovely day and here's a lovely lady with us, so let's enjoy them while we can. Will you have a drink with me, Bradley? That is, if my credit at the bar is still holding up?"

"Thanks," said Bradley. "I'd like one."

He moved toward his suitcase, limping awkwardly, but O'Riley got there first and picked it up.

"I've got it. Come along with us, Ellen dear."

Bradley glanced at her uncertainly. She saw the look and laughed merrily.

"You're wondering about my costume—or lack of it? Don't. It's quite all right."

"I didn't mean," Bradley began, confused.

She linked a firm, tanned arm through his. "You see, I work here. It's part of my job to parade around in the almost altogether like I am now as a sort of practical demonstration of how healthy and mild the climate is."

"Not to mention adding a delightful bit of scenery to the surroundings," O'Riley added.

"Part of your job," Bradley repeated. "What's the rest of it?"

"Teaching fat ladies to swim," Ellen answered.

"She also does fancy diving when the customers need to be amused," O'Riley said. "You'll have to watch her show sometime, Bradley. She's a dream in motion, no less."

"There's only one trouble with dreams," Ellen said, and her voice was bitter. "You can't eat them."

CHAPTER II

DEATH DID NOT REGISTER

THE cocktail lounge was, like the rest of the Mar Vista, as elegantly luxurious as money and human ingenuity could make it. It had soft leather seats and flatteringly dim lights and a chromium and black bar that ran the length of one side of the long room.

It had a drunk, too, but he was as neat and quietly well bred as his surroundings. He was a fat, round little man dressed in a white Palm Beach suit, and he was sitting alone at the far table with his head down on his arms. Only the shiny top of his bald head was visible.

The bartender slid tall, frosted glasses in front of Ellen and Bradley and O'Riley and withdrew as quietly and unobstrusively as a shadow.

O'Riley raised his drink and nodded at Bradley. "Here's to the breaks we'll never get."

Bradley nodded, drinking. "What are you doing here, O'Riley?"

O'Riley sighed sadly. "I had it in my mind to marry some money, since I seem to have no luck getting any through my own efforts. I found a good prospect, too. I followed her here. She was fat and fifty, and she wheezed, but she was positively dripping with cash."

"Why didn't you marry her?" Bradley asked.

"I was too greedy," O'Riley admitted. "I wanted a little ready money, so I told her I had to lift the mortgage on my ancestral castle in England or my father, the duke, would get tossed out on his ear. Instead of trusting me like I thought she would, she had her lawyer look the matter up. They found there wasn't any castle or any duke, either. She got angry about that for some reason. She moved out, and she wouldn't even lend me enough money to pay my bill, so I have to keep on staying here until I get thrown out."

Ellen set her glass down on the bar with a little exasperated click. "I just don't understand you at all! You—you do these things that are wrong, and then you don't even care! You laugh about it!"

"Oh, I can cry, too," O'Riley assured her. "Very convincingly. My tears flow like a river. I'll give you a demonstration sometime. What's the matter with you, Bradley?"

"Nothing," said Bradley.

THE drunk had gotten up from his table and was steering a wavering course along the bar. He was smiling in a silly, unfocused way. He wore a small black mustache waxed to neat spike points, and his eyes were blue and bulging and round as marbles.

"How do you do—do you do?" he said, bowing politely if unsteadily. "Have you had the pleasure of meeting me? My name is Jerome Verdon."

"Hello," said O'Riley. "Our names are Smith or something. Don't let us keep you from your work."

The bartender leaned toward him. "There's a drink for you at your table, Mr. Verdon," he hinted persuasively. "Wouldn't you like to go over there and sit down?"

"No," Verdon answered judicially. "I don't think I would. I think I would rather talk to these kind people."

"Maybe they don't want to talk to you," said the bartender.

"But they don't have to," said Verdon reasonably. "I'll talk to them. Won't I, people?"

"I'm afraid you will," O'Riley answered.

"I'm going to show you something nice," Verdon told them solemnly. "Look."

He took a bulging chamois-skin pouch from his coat pocket, fumbled with the knot on the draw-string. He finally got it unfastened and upended the pouch over the bar.

There was a sudden rattle as its contents fell out and spread in an incredibly brilliant spray that gathered all the light in the room and reflected it in hard, dazzling little streaks.

"Oh!" Ellen gasped involuntarily.

"Pretty, eh?" Verdon said complacently.

They were jewels of every size, shape and hue. Magnificently colored stones that had a flaming life of their own. There were literally dozens of them. One had fallen off back of the bar, and the bartender sighed in a resigned way and picked it up and dropped it beside the rest of them.

"Emerald," said Verdon, pointing to a flat green stone. "And this is a ruby. That's a pearl. These are diamonds."

"Don't get excited, folks," the bartender told them. "They're phonies."

"Oh!" Ellen said, gasping again. "I—I thought for a moment they were real!"

Verdon beamed at her. "Did you? Did you really? They're not, of course. They're imitations, but aren't they good ones?"

"Very good," Ellen said regretfully.

Verdon grew confidential. "I'm going to make my fortune with them. You know how much this cost to make?" He picked up an enormous square diamond. "A dollar. I'm going to put them in brooches and bracelets and shoe buckles and things like that and sell them in women's shops for costume jewelry. I mean, really good costume jewelry. I'll make millions."

"I'm sure you will," Ellen agreed.

Verdon grew even more confidential. "The trouble is that the initial investment is quite large. This is the only stock I have made up, and you can understand I'm going to have to get a lot more before I can start selling wholesale. Now if either one of you gentlemen would be interested in making a small investment guaranteed to return a thousand percent—"

"Ah—ah!" said the bartender warningly. "That's all. Pick up your toys and run along."

Verdon drew himself up in blurred indignation. "What do you mean, sir? I am offering these gentlemen a priceless opportunity—"

The bartender took the chamois-skin pouch, scooped the jewels into it and knotted the draw-string. "This is a bar, not a bucket shop."

Verdon snatched the pouch away from him. "Sir, I resent both your tone and your insinuation. I shall report this insolence to the management." Verdon marched out of the room, staggering just a little, the pouch clasped in one pudgy hand.

"Sorry, folks," said the bartender. "He's a screwball."

"Those were nice imitations," O'Riley commented.

"Yeah," said the bartender. "They look good—now. But you better investigate before you put any money in 'em. The guy was crocked in here yesterday, and he let it slip that they lose all their shine if they're kept out in the sun for an hour or so."

BRADLEY checked in at the desk and was told that Courtney, the owner of the hotel, had gone to San Benito on business and would be back shortly. Bradley was assigned a room on the fifth floor, and he rode up in the elevator.

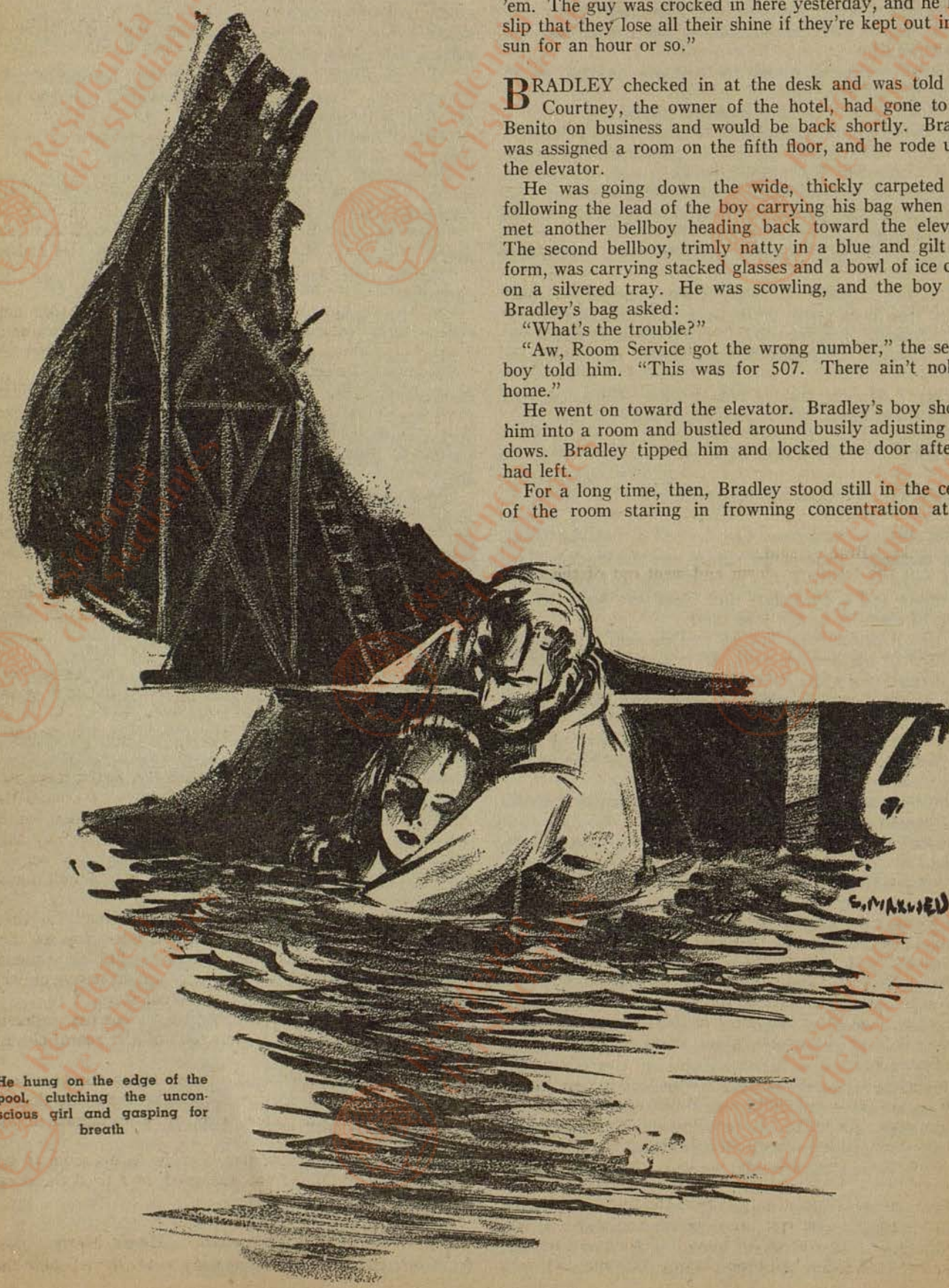
He was going down the wide, thickly carpeted hall following the lead of the boy carrying his bag when they met another bellboy heading back toward the elevator. The second bellboy, trimly natty in a blue and gilt uniform, was carrying stacked glasses and a bowl of ice cubes on a silvered tray. He was scowling, and the boy with Bradley's bag asked:

"What's the trouble?"

"Aw, Room Service got the wrong number," the second boy told him. "This was for 507. There ain't nobody home."

He went on toward the elevator. Bradley's boy showed him into a room and bustled around busily adjusting windows. Bradley tipped him and locked the door after he had left.

For a long time, then, Bradley stood still in the center of the room staring in frowning concentration at the



He hung on the edge of the pool, clutching the unconscious girl and gasping for breath

barred pattern that sunlight made on the soft carpet. He was feeling that queer chill of apprehension that meant danger in the air and close to him. He resented it. He had come here for peace and quiet and rest, and they were not for him, not now.

The fat little man in the bar had not been drunk—at least not as drunk as he was pretending to be. And his name wasn't Jerome Verdon or anything like it. He was clever and quick-witted, that little man. He had known Bradley would recognize him and had put on his act at the bar to tip Bradley off to his new identity.

Bradley's lips tightened to a thin line. There was one thing more, and it made the situation as deadly as a time bomb. Those jewels the little man had thrown around so casually weren't imitations. They were real. Judged by their number and their size, they must have been worth at least two hundred thousand dollars.

Picking up his suitcase, Bradley threw it on the bed and opened it. From under his folded clothes, he took a long ugly automatic. It was a nine-millimeter Mauser machine pistol—a wickedly effective weapon that, when fitted with a wooden stock that served also as a holster, could be used as a sub-machine gun. Bradley found a clip of ten cartridges and loaded it.

He slid the gun into his waistband, buttoned his coat. Ordinarily it would have made a plainly visible bulge, but Bradley had lost over twenty pounds in the hospital and his clothes were so loose it didn't show at all.

HE picked up the telephone and asked for the desk. When the clerk answered, he said: "Have you a Mr. Jerome Verdon staying at the hotel?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you tell me his room number, please?"

"It's 507."

"Thanks," Bradley said.

He put the telephone down and went out of the room, locking the door carefully behind him. He went along the hall, watching the numbers until he found 507. He knocked softly on the door and waited.

There was no answer. Bradley slid his hand inside his coat and touched the cold, grooved butt of the Mauser.

"It's Bradley," he called.

There was nothing but silence from the room. Bradley looked both ways along the hall and then tried the knob. It turned easily in his hand, and the latch clicked. Slowly Bradley pushed the door open.

The slats of the Venetian blinds had been pulled shut and the room was dim and shadowy. Bradley slid inside and closed the door behind him with a flick of his elbow. He had the Mauser in his right hand, poised alertly, the hammer back at full cock.

"Matesceu," he said.

There was no answer. Bradley's eyes were used to the dim light now. He moved a pace to his left, and he could see into the space between the wall and the bed.

The little man who had called himself Verdon and Matesceu and a great many other names at various times was lying crumpled in a loose pile there, face down. The wooden haft of a butcher knife stood up between his shoulderblades.

Bradley didn't attempt to go closer. He knew death when he saw it. Still holding the Mauser ready, he looked in the closet and under the bed and in the bath. There were no other hiding places, and there was no one else in the room.

Bradley came back and stared down at the body behind the bed. His face was grimly drawn, the lines in it deeper and more harsh. The last time—before this day—he had seen the little man who called himself Verdon had been in Poland where Verdon had been playing hide-and-seek with the German Gestapo. The Gestapo is a grim sort of an opponent to have in any game. They pay off in death.

Bradley was wondering if they had paid off this time. His lips moved into a thin smile, but there was something bitter and deadly in his eyes. He picked up the telephone from its stand beside the bed.

"Do you know if Mr. Courtney has come back from San Benito yet?" he asked the hotel operator.

"Yes, sir. He has."

"Will you tell him to come up to room 507 at once? Tell him to bring the hotel detective with him."

"Why—why, yes. Right away, sir."

CHAPTER III

CHEAP KILLER, CHIEF

COURTNEY was a tall man with gray, smooth hair and a very tanned face. He had a detached, icily polite air and the fact that a man had been murdered in his hotel apparently didn't disturb him in the slightest. He nodded at Bradley in a casual way and said:

"This is Drew, the house detective."

Drew was thin and round-shouldered with a big nose and slyly knowing eyes. He looked out of the corners of them at Bradley, studying him, and then bent over the body behind the bed in eager anticipation.

Courtney said: "Sorry you ran into a thing like this as soon as you arrived, Bradley. Nothing like it has ever happened at the hotel before."

Bradley watched him a moment. "Were you insinuating something?"

"Of course not," said Courtney. "It's unfortunate, that's all. I've sent for Morris, the chief of police of San Benito. He'll be here immediately. They incorporated this land into the city limits so I'd have to pay city taxes, and since I support the place I demand service."

Drew stood up, rubbing his big nose. "The guy's dead, all right. As dead as they come. Not long, though. He's still kinda warm. It's funny, huh?"

Courtney looked at him coldly. "What is?"

"Well, somebody stuck this guy for his jewels, see? And the rocks are phoney. The guy that did it is gonna get a big surprise when he tries to pawn 'em."

"How do you know he was killed for the jewels?" Bradley asked.

Drew looked surprised. "For what else would they stick him? It was an outside job, see? Everybody around the hotel knew the rocks was fakes. He always carried 'em in his coat pocket, and they ain't there now, so the guy that stuck him took 'em, see?"

"Yes," said Courtney in a bored tone. "Don't touch anything more until Morris comes."

"Sure not," Drew answered. "I know enough for that. I had a lot of experience in matters like this. You see that knife in his back? That ain't one of our knives. I mean, it don't belong to the hotel. We only use expensive cutlery around here, and that came from a dime store."

"Go outside and wait for Morris," Courtney ordered.

"Sure," said Drew. He went out of the room, closing the door carefully.

Courtney said: "He's a fool. I keep him around to check on the servants and routine things like that. He doesn't know anything about crime. How did you happen to discover the body?"

"I'd met Verdon in the bar. I came to his room to see him. I knocked but no one answered, so I tried the door. It was unlocked."

DREW opened the door again. "Here's Morris, boss. Come right in, Chief. The body's over there behind the

bed, see? The murderer stuck him in the back with a butcher knife and then bounced him over the bed into the corner so he wouldn't be noticed right away, maybe."

Morris nodded shortly. He was a thickset man with an immensely deep, broad chest and very wide shoulders. His face was tanned to a deep reddish brown, and the sun had faded his blond hair until it was almost colorless. His blue eyes were shrewd and alert and hard.

He crowded back of the bed and knelt beside the body, lifting one of its arms calculatingly and then letting it fall back again.

"Dead about a half-hour, I think," he said, standing up again.

"That's what I figured," Drew told him. "I figured it wasn't very long on account of he was still warm, see? Now that knife there, Chief, that's a dime-store knife and it didn't come from our kitchen. Now you take that knife and the fact that everybody in the hotel knew the jewels this bird packed around was phonies, and it adds up to an outside job, see?"

"Jewels?" Morris repeated, looking at Courtney.

Courtney nodded. "The murdered man is Jerome Verdon. This is his room. He's been here at the hotel for a week. He spent most of his time in the bar. He had a bag of jewels he carried around in his pocket. He was trying to find someone to put up money to make the stuff and wholesale it as costume jewelry."

Morris indicated Bradley. "Who is this man?"

"Mr. Bradley," Courtney answered. "He's a guest of the hotel. He discovered the body."

"Say," said Drew eagerly. "Say, I just thought of something. This bird Bradley. He just now arrived at the hotel, and maybe he didn't know the jewels were phonies—"

"Drew!" Courtney said in a flat, exasperated tone. "Morris, if you want me I'll be in my office. Come along, Drew."

Drew followed him out, looking back with the pained expression of a small boy being forcibly led out of a candy store.

Morris looked at Bradley. "That Drew. He's got gravy for brains. Sometimes, though, by accident he comes up with something halfway smart. What about it? Did you know these jewels Verdon carried around with him were phonies?"

"Verdon told me so. You can check up on that if you wish. It was down in the bar about a half-hour ago."

Morris nodded. "I see. How'd you happen to discover the body?"

"I was interested in his proposition. I came to see him about it."

"Wait a minute," Morris ordered.

HE BEGAN to search the room. He was astonishingly light and quick on his feet for so heavily built a man, and he was an expert at his job. He didn't disturb anything, but he didn't miss any possible hiding places. He finished up by searching the body and then looked at Bradley with raised eyebrows.

Bradley shrugged and raised his arms invitingly. Morris found nothing that interested him except the Mauser pistol, and he examined that in a gingerly respectful way. He had evidently handled one before. He let the hammer down to its safety position and gave the gun back to Bradley.

"Kinda dangerous to carry it cocked that way. It's quite a lot of gun to pack around anyway."

"It's a war souvenir," Bradley explained.

"Oh," said Morris. "Well, the jewels ain't here, so I guess that settles it."

"Settles what?" Bradley asked.

"Drew was accidentally right. This was an outside job. Some crook saw Verdon waving his phoney rocks around in San Benito or somewhere and followed him here and biffed him, not knowing the stuff was imitation."

Bradley stared at him incredulously. "You mean you're just going to let it go at that?"

"Well, no," said Morris defensively. "Of course not. I'll look around in San Benito and see if I can't get a line on something."

"In San Benito? Why don't you look here? This is where the murder occurred."

"Yeah, and you'd better be glad it did."

"Why?" Bradley demanded bluntly.

"If it was anywhere else I'd be looking you over pretty damned carefully."

"Go ahead and do it here."

Morris shrugged. "Oh, I suppose you're in the clear, but I couldn't do anything about it if you weren't. You heard Courtney when Drew started heading in that direction. Courtney closed him off in a hurry. That's a good enough hint for me."

"Do you take orders from Courtney, too?"

Morris' lips tightened, and then he shrugged philosophically. "It doesn't sound so good when you come out with it in plain English, but it's true enough. Sure I take orders from him.

"This hotel pays half the total taxes of San Benito. If I ran crosswise of Courtney he could have my job in ten minutes. I'm not sticking my neck out in his direction, and I know damned well he doesn't want me running around here pestering the guests or making a big noise about murder."

"So there isn't going to be a noise?"

"Not any," Morris agreed.

"I think maybe you're wrong about that."

"I wouldn't bet on it if I were you," Morris said softly. "I'm pretty near always right—around this neck of the woods."

CHAPTER IV

AROUND THE WORLD WITH JEOPARDY

ELLEN GREY'S back, revealed by the deep V of her white bathing suit, was like a plaque of exquisitely rippling bronze with the warm tint of flesh under it. Her slender, graceful legs were doubled up, her feet tucked into the cross-bar of the chromium stool, and she had her head turned toward O'Riley, smiling at something he was saying.

Calculating the time, Bradley judged that O'Riley had probably put away about ten drinks, but he showed no signs of it. Liquor had no effect on him at all until he reached the point where he fell flat on his face and stayed there, and he was still a long way from that.

"Ah!" he said, spotting Bradley in the mirror. "It's our grave and ghostly friend again. Sit down, sit down."

"Come over to a table," Bradley said.

"No, no!" O'Riley refused merrily. "I like to look at the bottles behind the bar. It's an education in itself. A little costly and indirect, it's true, but—"

"Come over to a table," Bradley said.

O'Riley stopped grinning. "Ah, yes. A table. Perhaps that would be a good idea. Come, Ellen dear."

She went with them, looking puzzled in a worried, uncertain way. O'Riley selected a table in a far corner and seated Ellen ceremoniously in one of the chairs around it.

"Well?" he said inquiringly, sitting down in another chair and watching Bradley narrowly. "Do you see what I mean now, Ellen? Do you see the look on his face?"

"You—you're joking again," she said uneasily.

"I greatly fear that I'm not," said O'Riley. "Go ahead, Bradley. What do you want?"

Bradley looked at Ellen. "Has he been in here with you ever since I left?"

"Why, yes."

"Are you sure? All the time?"

"Why—why . . ."

"You're embarrassing the sweet little thing," O'Riley answered for her. "As a matter of fact, I wasn't. I stepped out to the men's room for a moment or two."

Bradley was still looking at Ellen. "How long was he gone?"

Her eyes were wide and dilated. "I—I don't know. Really, I don't. I wasn't paying any attention. Just a few minutes. Not long."

"Well?" O'Riley said.

Bradley said slowly: "The little drunk—Verdon. His name wasn't Verdon."

O'Riley nodded. "I had an idea it—" He grew as still as a snake poised to strike. "Did you say *wasn't?*"

"Yes."

"That's too bad," O'Riley said carefully.

"What—what is it?" Ellen asked.

"Our friend the little drunk is dead," O'Riley told her absently.

"He was murdered," Bradley elaborated. "Just a little while ago. Do you know anything about that, O'Riley?"

"Not I," said O'Riley. "Not a thing."

"You had an idea his name wasn't Verdon."

"Yes," O'Riley admitted. "I thought you knew him, from the way you looked. And if you knew him, why should he tell you his name, unless he wasn't using his own?"

"Have you got any more ideas?"

"About what?" O'Riley asked.

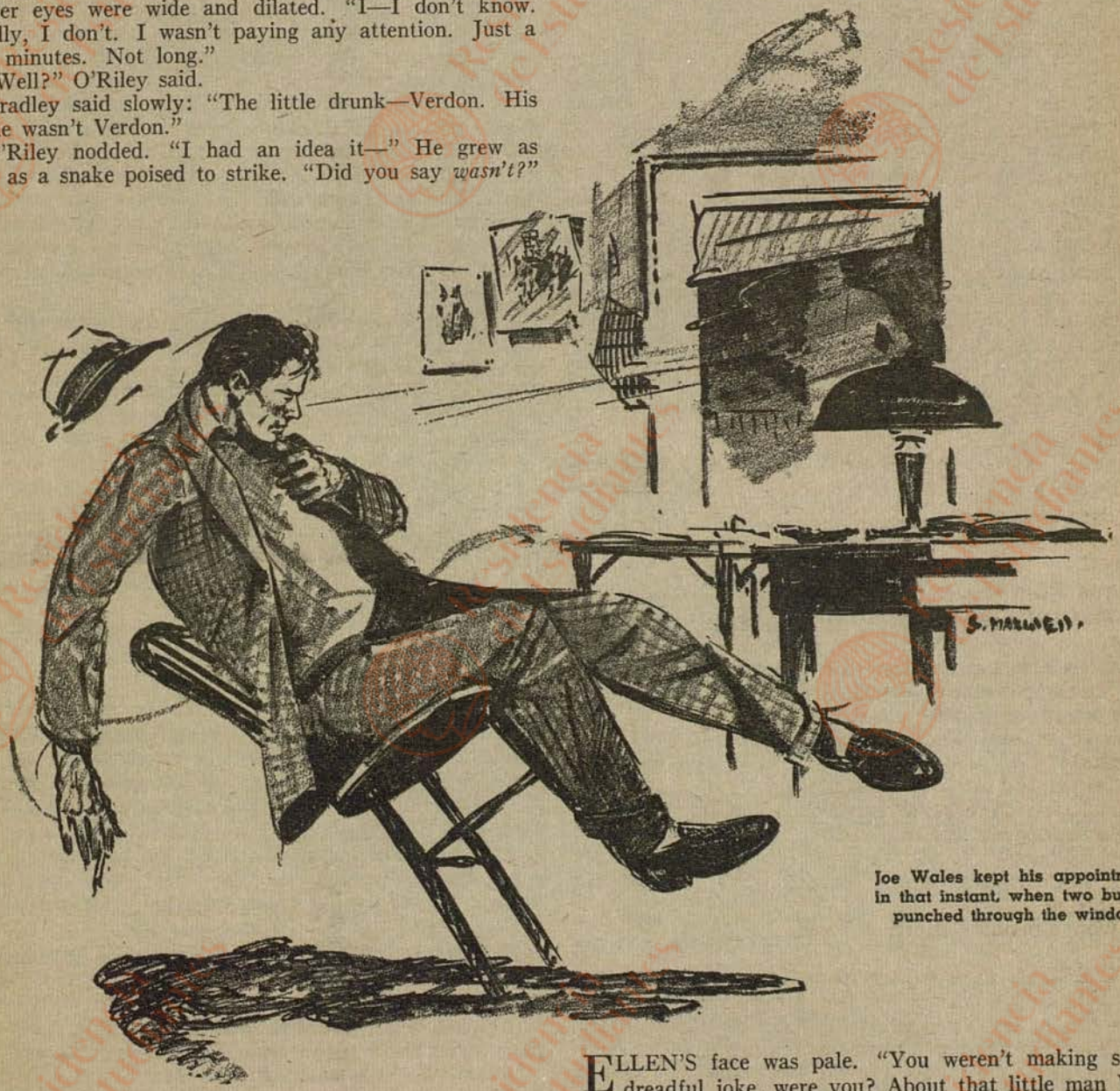
"His jewelry."

"Why, yes," said O'Riley. "Yes, I have. One or two." He stood up. "I think I'll be running along. Ellen, my love, I'll see you this evening."

Bradley said: "Verdon was a friend of mine, O'Riley."

"Was he, indeed?" O'Riley asked carelessly.

He walked out of the lounge, erect and debonair and confident, whistling a gay, soft tune.



Joe Wales kept his appointment in that instant, when two bullets punched through the window

ELLEN'S face was pale. "You weren't making some dreadful joke, were you? About that little man Verdon?"

"No," Bradley answered. "I found him in his room just after he had left here. He had been stabbed in the back."

"Oh! But you can't think that O'Riley . . ."

"I don't know—yet. I'll find out."

Ellen shivered. "I don't like it when you look the way you are now. Please don't."

"I can't help it," Bradley said slowly. "I'll tell you something. I was in Poland during the blitz. I was a technician with the Polish air force. Everything happened pretty fast there, you know. I had just arrived and started on my job when the Germans overran the country.

"I had a commission in the Polish army. That is, I was supposed to have one. The papers hadn't gone through, and I had nothing to show that I *was* in the army—not even a uniform. If the Germans had caught me I would certainly have been shot."

Ellen was staring at him, fascinated. "What happened?"

Bradley shrugged. "I didn't get caught, naturally, or I wouldn't be here. And the reason I didn't was a little man who was traveling on a Turkish passport under the name of Matesceu, although he was really an American. He got me out. He didn't have to do that. He didn't make anything out of it, and he took a very great risk. The Gestapo was only a step behind him as it was."

"What was he doing?" Ellen asked.

"Buying up jewelry. He was a crook—no more or less. But he wasn't cheating the sellers of the jewelry. He was only paying a fraction of the real worth of the stuff, but if the owners hadn't sold to him the Germans would have confiscated it or taken it and paid with their phoney waste-paper marks, which amounts to the same thing. The owners were glad enough to get a little real money."

"That seems so strange and—and far away," Ellen said.

"Not as far as you think," Bradley said soberly. "Matesceu was on his way to making an enormous profit, but the risk he took was even more enormous. Still he took the added risk of saving my neck. Matesceu was Verdon. A man doesn't just forget the kind of thing he did for me."

"Jewelry!" Ellen said suddenly. "What was he doing with those imitations he showed to us?"

"That's the point. Those weren't imitations. They were real stones."

Ellen's face was stiff with astonishment. "No! I mean, he wouldn't carry them around, show them to everyone . . ."

Bradley nodded. "He was a queer little guy—took the craziest risks. He cooked up that story and that drunk stock-chiseling act to divert suspicion from himself. As a matter of fact, not many people can tell real stones from good fake ones when they're that size."

"But why did he carry them around? Why didn't he put them in a vault or a bank?"

"He must have smuggled them into this country so he wouldn't have to pay the duty on them. He was going to sell them to some fence. From the way he was acting, I'm sure he was here to make contact with the man. I don't think he himself knew who the fence was. That was another reason he was flashing the stones around the way he was—to tip off the prospective buyer when he showed up. Fences who can handle a deal that size are few and far between and keep themselves well under cover."

"You found him? Verdon, I mean?"

"Yes. I wouldn't turn him up—not after what he did for me. But I was going to tell him that I'd tip the government off to the fact that the jewels were smuggled—which would make them too hot even for a fence to handle—unless he paid the duty on them."

"Wouldn't that have made him angry?"

"Yes," Bradley said. "I expected to have some trouble. In spite of the fact that he looked very harmless, he was a tough customer when he got mad."

"Did he—did you—"

Bradley smiled at her. "No. I didn't kill him."

ELLEN'S face was flushed. "I know. It was foolish to even think . . . But you and O'Riley, you're both so hard and so casual about things. I feel when I'm around you that—that there's violence in the air, like things are ready to explode any moment."

"They are," Bradley admitted. "O'Riley sold my life and those of a half-hundred Chinese for under two thousand dollars. He'd do a lot worse and do it sooner to get hold of a quarter of a million dollars worth of jewels. He knows they're real—knew it as soon as he saw them. I don't think he has them—not from the way he acted just now. But he'll certainly make a try at getting them."

"You warned him, didn't you? When you said Verdon was your friend?"

"Yes. That won't stop him, though. And there's another party in this. Courtney knows the stones are genuine."

"Courtney!" Ellen exclaimed.

"Yes. No one could run a hotel like this—dealing with the luxury trade—without being able to tell fake jewelry from real."

"But perhaps it wasn't anyone connected with the hotel—or with us. Perhaps it was the Gestapo."

Bradley shook his head. "I thought so at first, but they don't do things this way. They would have made the death look like accident or suicide. They wouldn't have left it unexplained. They don't like investigations. Although there isn't going to be much of a one here. Not with Courtney calling the cards and Morris dealing them for him."

Ellen sighed, shaking her head in a puzzled way. "This all happened so quickly. It was so peaceful, and then you came and—and . . ."

"And so did trouble," Bradley finished. "Perhaps it would have been better if I'd stayed away."

"Oh, no!" Ellen exclaimed, and then added hastily: "I mean, it isn't your fault."

"I think what happens from now on will be, though," Bradley said. "I wonder if you can tell me the name of one of the bellboys here? He's short and thick-set—twenty-one or twenty-two. Has black curly hair and a cleft in his chin and greenish eyes. Good-looking kid in sort of a smart-aleck way."

Ellen nodded. "Oh, yes. That's Joe Wales. He's a pest. He thinks he's a demon with the women."

"Can you tell when he'd be off duty?"

Ellen looked at the clock. "At four. About a half-hour ago. I can tell you where he'll be now. In San Benito at a place called Grayle's on Center Street. It's a bookie joint. He's a runner for the place—takes bets from the help around here and relays them. He always goes in to pay off and collect right after work."

"Thanks," Bradley said. "Don't tell anyone I asked about him." He stood up. "I'll have to leave you now. Perhaps I'll see you later this evening?"

Ellen looked worried. "I hope you will."

"I hope so, too," said Bradley with a grim little undertone in his voice.

CHAPTER V

DANGEROUS MOONBEAM

THE lobby of the Mar Vista was an enormous room, exactly square, with a high, arched ceiling that caught every sound from below and bounced the echoes back and forth in a constant droning hum. The side that faced the sea was one great glass panel.

Courtney was standing at the desk listening to a fat woman with a Pekinese dog under each arm. The woman was complaining in a high, querulous voice, and the Pekinese were furnishing a sort of duet accompaniment, snarling at each other and at Courtney and everyone who passed. They yapped at Bradley, and Courtney nodded to him.

"Just a second, Mr. Bradley."

"I'm going to show you something nice," the drunk said solemnly, and sprinkled a cascade of jewels on the bar

Bradley waited beside the front entrance. Courtney got rid of the fat woman finally and joined him. He looked as unperturbed as usual, and he asked casually:

"Is everything satisfactory?"

"If you mean the room—yes. Thanks. It's very nice."

Courtney nodded. "I noticed you talking to O'Riley and Ellen Grey. Had you known O'Riley before you met him here?"

"Yes."

"Then I don't need to warn you about him. Ellen Grey is very nice. She's a local girl. She was born in San Benito and has always lived here. She has a pretty hard time of it. She can only work here during the season, and she has a mother and two younger brothers to support."

"Is she a good diver?"

"Very good," Courtney told him. "Western amateur high-board champion for three years. An excellent swimmer, too. Runner-up at the national trials in the backstroke." He paused thoughtfully and then said: "You can go ahead and enjoy yourself, Mr. Bradley. The police won't bother you with any questions about Verdon—providing you don't say anything to anyone about the matter."

"Supposing I do?"

Courtney looked at him coldly. "I don't want you to."

"Why not?"

Courtney moved his shoulders in a little shrug. "I don't want the patrons bothered."

"Verdon was a patron."

"Not a regular one. And he was registered under a false name. You knew that, didn't you?"

"Yes."

Courtney nodded. "I don't care who he was or what your interest in him was. I'm not interested. But I don't want it broadcast that people of his sort stay at this hotel. I might mention that I'm keeping the police from bothering *you*. In return, you can just forget the whole matter."

"I'm not going to," Bradley said evenly.

"You'll regret it if you don't," Courtney said. His voice was polite still, but there was no doubt he meant just what he said. Without another word he turned on his heel and walked back toward the desk.

Bradley went out the door and limped the length of the long veranda toward the taxi stand on the side driveway. He got in the first cab.

"San Benito, please," he said to the driver.

"Hold it a minute," a voice ordered.

It was Morris. He leaned his thick forearms on the door and looked in at Bradley.

"This hotel is a mighty nice place," he said. "Why don't you relax and enjoy it? I don't think you'd like San Benito at all."

"Thanks for telling me," Bradley said. "Go ahead, driver."

Morris stepped back, and the cab wheeled down the drive and turned out on the highway. The driver slowed a little and looked back over his shoulder at Bradley.

"Mac, do you know that was the chief of police of San Benito that was talkin' to you?"

"Yes," Bradley answered.

"I ain't one to poke my puss in other people's business," said the driver, "but if he says you won't like it in San Benito—you won't."

"I'll take the chance."

"You sure will," the driver agreed. "A big one."

IT WAS dusk now, and in San Benito garish green and red Neon signs had begun to flare against the gathering darkness that crept in from the Pacific with the damp coolness of the night breeze.

The main street was narrow and crooked, roughly paralleling the beach, and the buildings along it were shoddy and dilapidated, crowded in close together, helter-skelter. Juke boxes banged away in the bars and barkers shouted their raucous invitations and rifles cracked in a shooting gallery. The walks were crowded with fat women in slacks and men with sunburned peeling noses.

Grayle's had a green Neon sign in its shuttered front window, and Bradley went through the door into a narrow, bare room with a long bar on one side. The place was running wide open. There were blackboards against the back wall with scrawled chalk-marks on them indicating odds and horses and payoffs at the various tracks.

The day's business was over now, and the room was empty except for a few losers who sat glumly hunched over their drinks at the bar. Bradley ordered a beer and, when the bartender sat the glass down in front of him, asked:

"Can you tell me where I could find Joe Wales?"

The bartender shook his head slowly and sadly. "Never heard of the guy, chum."

"He works at the Mar Vista."

"Does he?" the bartender asked indifferently.

"So do I."

"What doin'?"

"Fry cook. I'm new there. I owe Joe ten bucks, and I want to pay him before I get drunk and spend it."

"In that case," said the bartender, "maybe you better go through the door there and up the stairs and rap on the door at the top."

Bradley finished his beer and walked along the bar to the rear of the room. He found a door behind a curtain, opened it, and went up a narrow flight of stairs that creaked dangerously under his limping steps. At the top there was an unshaded light bulb burning dismally over a door that had *Private* scrawled across it in chalk.

Bradley knocked on the door.

"Yeah?" a voice said.

Bradley opened the door. The bellboy he had seen in the hall of the Mar Vista was alone in the room. He was sitting tipped back in a chair with his neatly shod feet braced against the sill of the room's one window.

"You're Joe Wales?" Bradley asked.

"That's right." He was working on his fingernails with careful attention to detail. He wore a green suit with very wide padded shoulders, and a matching dark green hat was tipped back on his head. A cigarette in the corner of his mouth dribbled smoke up toward the stained ceiling.

Bradley closed the door, and Joe Wales looked up at him with a sudden, alert jerk of his head.

"I want to talk to you about a number," Bradley told him.

"Wrong party, pal," Wales said. "I don't handle the numbers. Only horses."

"This number is 507."

The nail file slipped out of Wales' fingers and made a tinny tinkle on the floor. "Huh? I don't get it."

"It's a room number," Bradley said. "A room with a dead man in it."

"MAYBE you're cracked or something," Joe Wales said, moistening his lips. "This is no nut factory. On your way."

"Room Service at the Mar Vista doesn't make very many mistakes. A hotel of that quality can't afford it. There was no mistake today. Those ice cubes and glasses you took up were ordered by 507."

"Hell!" Joe Wales exclaimed suddenly. "You're the guy I met in the hall—"

"Yes. The guy you met in the hall after you had gone into room 507 and come out again."

"Huh?" said Joe Wales.

"You didn't just knock on the door and leave. You were in that room."

Joe Wales smiled in a way he thought was superior and casual. "Oh, yeah? So I suppose you're gonna prove that, huh? So I suppose you found my fingerprints or something?"

"No. You're just smart enough to think of them."

"Yeah. So maybe you better be smart, too. Maybe you better pick up your pants and blow out of here while you still got your health. Go on. Scram. I'm expectin' a party for a private interview. I got an appointment—"

He was right about that. He had one, and he kept it just at that instant. Two bullets punched round, silver-edged holes in the window glass and changed his face into a formless red smear.

The blast of the twin reports rattled the thin walls. Joe Wales' chair upended and dumped him on the floor in a shapeless pile, and he never moved again. A third bullet knocked out a triangular piece of window glass and smacked into the door panel in line with where Bradley had been standing a split-second before.

He wasn't there any more. He had jumped sideways, agile in spite of his bad leg. His arm flipped out now and the long barrel of the Mauser glinted just before it smashed into the green-shaded lamp and brought darkness into the room.

Bradley was still moving. He whirled around a card table and two chairs that were invisible in the darkness and ended up with his back flat against the wall beside the broken window. Feet scraped against wood outside and then thumped solidly on the ground below.

Bradley leaned forward and saw a faint shift in the swirling black shadows of the alley below. He fired and fired again, and the Mauser's reports were sharp, clear *whacks* against the racketing echoes of the duller reports that had come before them. He knew he had missed. He was aiming down and at an angle, and he couldn't see the sights.

He struck at the window with the pistol barrel, knocking away the rest of the shattered pane, and leaned recklessly out. He caught just a climpse of it—a scuttling bent figure that spun against the relatively lighter gloom of the alley mouth and was gone before he could shoot.

BRADLEY straddled the window sill, pushed himself away from the wall and dropped blindly downward. He hit with a shock that jarred his teeth and sent a needle-sharp stab of pain up his bad leg. He started to run, and the leg refused to obey, dragging like a cumbersome stick behind him. He clawed his way along the wall, staggering drunkenly, and reached the alley mouth.

It was as if some bad photographer had taken a flashlight picture of the street. People were caught in blurred stiff postures of surprise, and their faces were white smears staring at Bradley.

A police whistle bleated shrilly, and a fat uniformed patrolman came blundering through the crowd, tugging at his holstered revolver. He saw Bradley just as he got the revolver loose, and he fired at him without a second's hesitation.

The bullet cracked into the wall over Bradley's head, and Bradley yelled warningly. It didn't have the slightest

effect. The policeman kept right on blowing his whistle and fired the second time.

The bullet snapped past Bradley's ear. He whirled and ran back into the alley. The policeman fired twice more after him, still bleating frantically on his whistle.

Bradley's leg dragged a little yet, enough to throw him off balance, and he went thumping awkwardly past the window he had jumped from, on down the alley. It turned once, and then again, and then he ran head-on into a blank wall.

It was pitch-dark. A Neon sign made a blinking red smear somewhere high above and to his right, but it threw no light into the alley. Bradley groped blindly around him, and his fingernails scraped on one side wall and then another. He had blundered into a dead end of the alley.

He listened, breathing hard through his mouth. Behind him there was a bursting gabble of confused yells. Someone had turned a car so its headlights threw into the alley mouth. They reflected faintly even in Bradley's dead end. A revolver smacked as some shaky pursuer thought he saw a shadow move. Another let go with a shotgun, and buckshot rattled deafeningly on the walls.

Bradley swore in a tight, tense whisper. He was cornered. He didn't dare back-track. They would certainly spot him within seconds, and he would be riddled before he could say a word.

A hinge creaked rustily in the blackness. Bradley started to whirl, but a gun muzzle nosed coldly against the back of his neck.

"Step backward."

BRADLEY obeyed—one step and then another. He was still in pitch-darkness, but now he could smell the sweet, oily aroma of rum.

"Ah, yes," said O'Riley. "At your service, sir. Push the wall in place again, but kindly remember this is a gun you feel against your neck. Be careful where you point that Mauser. I can see in the dark like a cat."

Bradley felt ahead of him, located the braced section of boards. He pushed on it, and it moved slowly and shut with a soft click.

"Cute, eh?" said O'Riley. "It's a back way out for the betting establishment. Now if you'll just stand very, very still . . ."

His left hand tapped Bradley's pockets lightly and expertly.

"So you didn't get them?"

"No," Bradley answered.

"And all the shooting I heard? I hope there were no fatalities."

"Joe Wales, a bellboy at the Mar Vista, was killed."

"How sad," said O'Riley. "And did you shoot him, my sober-faced friend?"

"No."

"I believe you," said O'Riley. "Do you know why? Because you haven't got the jewels, and you were never the one to waste bullets. But I think you'd have a hard time getting your eager friends outside to listen."

Bradley's pursuers were closing in. The yelling was closer and more excited, and a fluttering blast of shots racketed noisily outside.

"Shooting at their own shadows," O'Riley commented. "My friend, listen to some good advice from the O'Riley. Get back to the Mar Vista and try to construct yourself something resembling an alibi while I lead the rabble yonder in a merry little dance around the town."

He opened the section of wall a few inches and shot casually twice into the alley. He apparently didn't care in the slightest whether or not he hit anyone. The yells chopped off short as the men outside hunted cover. Shots blasted noisily.

O'Riley closed the wall. "We're in a storeroom, my friend. Go through it and through the empty building beyond it, and you'll be in a passageway that leads to the back of a hotel. Go through the rear of it and out the side entrance, and you'll be a block north of the main street."

Bradley said: "Why are you helping me?"

"As to that," said O'Riley, "it's perhaps my better nature coming to the fore, but I doubt it. I've beaten my brains out trying to figure out who has Verdon's jewels. I haven't advanced an inch. But I think you'll find them if you're let alone."

"And then?"

"And then I'll find you," said O'Riley. "Goodbye, my dear friend. I'll give the yokels outside your love." He opened the wall section and fired again.

"They might get you."

"Get O'Riley?" said O'Riley incredulously. "That scum outside? They have a better chance of caging a moonbeam. Hurry along."

CHAPTER VI

THESE PERILOUS BAUBLES

BRADLEY rode down from the fifth floor in the elevator and walked out into the lobby of the Mar Vista. It was the dinner hour now, and there were only a few people in the big room.

Courtney and Drew and Morris were standing in a tense group in front of the desk, and as Bradley approached them Morris was saying:

". . . chased him all over town. He's a hell of a lot faster on his feet than he looks, but he's cornered now in an old warehouse at the end of Center Street. They've got the place surrounded, and there's no possible way for him to get out of it."

Drew saw Bradley. His mouth opened slowly, and his sly little eyes took on an expression of dull, glazed unbelief.

"Hello," Bradley said.

Courtney turned around. His lips thinned just slightly, but he didn't show any other sign of surprise, and he didn't say anything. He looked slowly and meaningly at Morris.

Morris' face flushed beet-red under its tan. "You! What— How'd you get here?"

"To the hotel, you mean?" Bradley asked. "Why, I came back in a cab. You were right. I didn't like San Benito. I didn't stay there five minutes."

"Where've you been since?" Morris demanded.

"Up in my room. Taking a nap."

Courtney turned to Drew. "Did you look in his room?"

"Huh?" Drew said. "Me? Why, no. I never figured—"

"You fool," said Courtney quietly.

"Is there anything wrong?" Bradley asked.

"Quite a lot," Courtney answered. "But it doesn't concern you—now. Have you had dinner?"

"I'm not hungry," Bradley said. "Could you tell me where I can find Ellen Grey?"

"Probably in the dining room," Courtney said.

As Bradley walked away, he heard Drew say suddenly and loudly: "Hey! If he's here, then who's in that warehouse—"

"Shut up," said Courtney.

Morris was headed for the door at a dead run, swearing in a bitterly choked monotone.

Ellen Grey wasn't in the dining room. Bradley looked in the lounge, the snack-bar and the game room but he couldnt' find her. He was in a hurry now. It wouldn't take Morris long to find out that he hadn't been in his room, and Bradley had an important question to ask Ellen Grey.

He went out on the terrace. The damp wind was rolling fog in ahead of it in damp misty tendrils that curled inquiring fingers around the floodlights on the lawn. The air felt raw against his face, and the mutter of the breakers on the beach sounded low and sullen in the distance.

One of the tennis courts was lighted. Bradley walked across the wet grass in that direction, but when he was close enough he saw that the players were all men.

He turned at an angle, meaning to go around to the service entrance of the hotel, and then he heard a faint rippling splash to his left. That was in the direction of the swimming pool, but there were no lights around it now.

Bradley decided that the wind must have stirred the water against a float or against the side of the pool. He walked three steps farther away, and then the splash was repeated. It was louder this time. Bradley turned around, and it came again and there was a choked gurgling cry that was cut off instantly.

He ran toward it, ducking around the high canvas windbreak. The water was black shining silk that rippled and moved uneasily, and there was something under it, vague and white and moving feebly near the deep end.

BRADLEY jumped in awkwardly, clothes and all. He was braced for a cold shock, but the water closed over him like a giant, warm hand. He was not a good swimmer, and his clothes hampered him, but he struck out in awkward, slashing strokes, trying to force himself down toward the bottom.

One hand hit silk and slid slipperly along it. He clutched again, desperately, and caught a smooth limp arm. The cement bottom of the pool shoved itself lazily against his knees. The air was hot and thick in his throat, and his desire to breathe in seemed to twist his whole body and flatten it.

He got his feet under him and heaved upward with a wrenching thrust that sent fiery agony along the length of his injured leg. He still had hold of the arm, and the body behind it was a dead, limp weight.

He kicked and twisted in frenzied effort, reaching blindly upward. Breath bubbled out of his nostrils, and he opened his mouth wide involuntarily, and then his head broke the surface. He gasped and choked, strangling with the desire to get air in his lungs. He tried to shout, and coughing doubled him up and sent his head under again.

He struggled back to the surface. The body he was holding was a leaden, deadly thing dragging him down. He got his hand under a soft armpit and slashed and kicked the water into a froth, fighting to get to the side. He was sinking again when his hand hit cement and hooked over the overflow trough with the strength of desperation.

He pulled the body in toward him, and Ellen's face was close to his, smooth and deathly pale under the bright blue of a rubber swim cap. Bradley could do nothing else but hold her. Exhaustion had drained his strength. He couldn't lift her out of the water. He hung there, sucking in the precious air in greedy gulps.

And then suddenly there was a face staring down at him, and Drew's excited voice yapped:

"Here! Here he is, boss! In the pool!"

Steps sounded rapid and hard-heeled on the cement runway, and Courtney said:

"Bradley! What are you—"

Bradley coughed again. "Help me—get her out."

"Drew!" Courtney said sharply. "Take her other arm, you fool. Help me."

They pulled her up smoothly over the edge. Bradley heaved himself up after her and sat on the cold cement, gasping.

"Is she—"

Ellen wore a silk racing suit now. It clung wetly to her, molded to the lithe graceful curves of her body.

The little man was lying crumpled in a loose pile

"She's all right," Courtney said.

Even as he spoke, she coughed and choked and coughed again. Her eyes opened, and she struggled to sit up.

"YOU'RE all right now, Ellen," Courtney said gently. "You're safe. You got into trouble in the pool, and Bradley had to pull you out. I warned you about being careful if you swam here alone at night."

"Courtney!" a voice shouted. "Drew!"

"Here!" Drew called. "Over by the pool, Chief."

Morris' feet thudded on the turf, and he pulled up beside them, panting. "I just heard from town! Bradley was lying! The bartender at Grayle's identified him, and there were two Mauser shells in the room where Wales—Oh! There you are, huh? You're under arrest!"

"Just a second," said Courtney. "I want to find out what happened to Ellen. What was it, Ellen?"

She tugged at her rubber cap dazedly. "Someone was in the pool. I was swimming near the deep end—just about to make a turn—and someone grabbed my arm and swung me around and—and hit me."

"Bradley!" said Drew triumphantly. "He socks the dame, see? And then he pretends like he's rescuin' her—"

"No, no!" said Ellen. "This man didn't have any clothes on."

"That doesn't matter," Morris said abruptly. "We can figure it out later. Get up, Bradley. I want to search you."

"For what?" Bradley asked.

"For those jewels of Verdon's. I know you've got them on you. Hand them over."

"Knock-knock," said O'Riley. "Can I come in?" He strolled up casually, his hands in his pockets.

"That guy!" Drew exclaimed. "*He* was in the warehouse!"

"Was I?" O'Riley asked. "How do you suppose I got out? My dear Ellen, that suit becomes you most charmingly. You should wear it more often. Hello, Bradley. You should have come to San Benito with me. There was great excitement. People were shooting firecrackers all over town."

"You dope!" said Drew. "Them wasn't firecrackers. They was guns."

"Shut up!" Morris snarled at him. He had his service revolver in his hand now. "Bradley, get up! I want those jewels!"

Bradley shrugged easily and stood up. Morris searched him. He found the Mauser and threw it back of him on the lawn with a satisfied grunt, but he didn't find the jewels.

"He ditched them!" he said angrily. "Turn on the floodlights! They're right around here somewhere close!"

Bradley looked at Ellen. "Courtney told me you had lived in San Benito all your life. Have you known Morris for very long?"

Ellen nodded, puzzled. "Why, yes. All my life."

"So what?" Morris demanded.

"Was he ever a life-guard?" Bradley asked.

"Sure, I was," Morris said, before she could answer.

"How long have you been a policeman?"

"Fifteen years. What does that—"

"THIS town," Bradley said. "San Benito. It has a flat sheltered beach. It would be easy to anchor out aways and send in longboats to land here. Has there ever been any liquor running here?"

Courtney said: "The place was famous—or infamous—for it during prohibition. There were more bootleggers, rum-runners and assorted crooks here than there were honest citizens."

"And the police knew them and looked the other way, meanwhile holding out a hand," Bradley finished.

Morris said: "That's all past—"

"And that was the trouble," Bradley interrupted. "During the liquor boom days you knew smugglers and crooks and fences by the dozen, and they knew you. One of them was Verdon. He wanted your protection and your contacts with fences. That's why he came here. Only you didn't have any contacts any more. You kidded him along until he got suspicious, and then you killed him and stole the jewels."

"You liar!" Morris yelled. "Shut your—"

"Wales saw you—in Verdon's room. He was a cheap chiseler. You knew him. You told him you'd give him a split, and he was waiting for you to come tonight in Grayle's when you killed him and tried for me.

"Then you came back here in a hurry to make yourself an alibi—just as I did. You were sure your police would get me, and you probably gave them some story about me being a desperate killer to make sure they wouldn't give me a chance to surrender."

"That's a lie!" Morris shouted. "I'm not going to—"

"Morris," said Courtney.

Morris turned to look at him. "Listen, don't pay any attention to—"

"Morris," said Courtney, "if you've used me and my hotel for your crooked work . . ."

Drew had been inching forward cautiously, and now his arm flipped up and down again, and there was a sodden thud. Morris fell face-down on the cement and rolled limply over on his back.

"Got him, boss!" Drew yapped. "That was my new blackjack! I paid seven-fifty for it, and I—"

"Be quiet," Courtney ordered. "Bradley, you were saying something about his being a life-guard."

BRADLEY nodded. "Ellen is an expert swimmer. No one but an expert would attempt to tackle her in the water. And what's more it is very, very difficult to hit a person hard enough to stun them in the water. A life-guard knows how."

"But—but why?" Ellen asked.

"You knew something that he didn't want you to tell me. Did you see him at all today?"

"Why, yes. Just before I met O'Riley on the terrace. Morris was going in the side entrance."

"That's it," said Bradley. "Morris, being police chief and a particular satelite of Courtney's, could come and go around the hotel without attracting any attention, but he knew I suspected him, and he knew I'd ask you about him. He took off his clothes and slipped in the pool when you were under water making a turn, and waited for you. He got out again while I was trying to rescue you."

"Why did you suspect him?" Courtney asked.

Bradley shrugged. "A crooked police chief in a crooked little town . . . And then, Verdon was no fool. It would be very difficult for anyone he didn't know well to get behind him. I knew whoever stabbed him was a confederate of his."

"I can see that I've been pretty much of a fool," Courtney said slowly. "This town has had a very bad reputation, and it's vital to me that it doesn't touch the hotel or the patrons here. It would ruin me if it did. I'm sorry for all this, and I hope you will accept my apologies. Drew, bring Morris along."

"Well, boss, he's kinda heavy to carry. How—"

"Drag him by the heels" Courtney said, striding away.

Bradley leaned over and picked up the Mauser. He looked at it speculatively, and then suddenly pointed it at O'Riley.

"I'll take those jewels now."

"What?" said O'Riley, surprised.

"The jewels. They were in Morris' clothes. You found them while Morris was in the pool. That's why Morris knew they must be close around here."

"Jewels?" O'Riley said. "There must be some mistake. I've seen no jewels. I thought you had them."

Bradley nodded to Ellen. "They're in the inside pocket of his coat. Take them out. Don't get between us."

"That gun has been under water," O'Riley said, eyeing it speculatively.

"Maybe it won't shoot," said Bradley. "Shall I pull the trigger and see?"

"Never mind," said O'Riley. "Ellen, my dear, you wouldn't side with this dripping scarecrow against the man who loves you with all his heart and what's left of his soul, would you?"

Ellen snatched the stained chamois-skin pouch from his inside pocket.

O'Riley sighed lengthily. "Ah, me! That just goes to show that charm is vastly overrated. May I ask what you intend to do with those pretty baubles?"

"Turn them over to the Polish legation. They'll use them to buy medical supplies for their refugees."

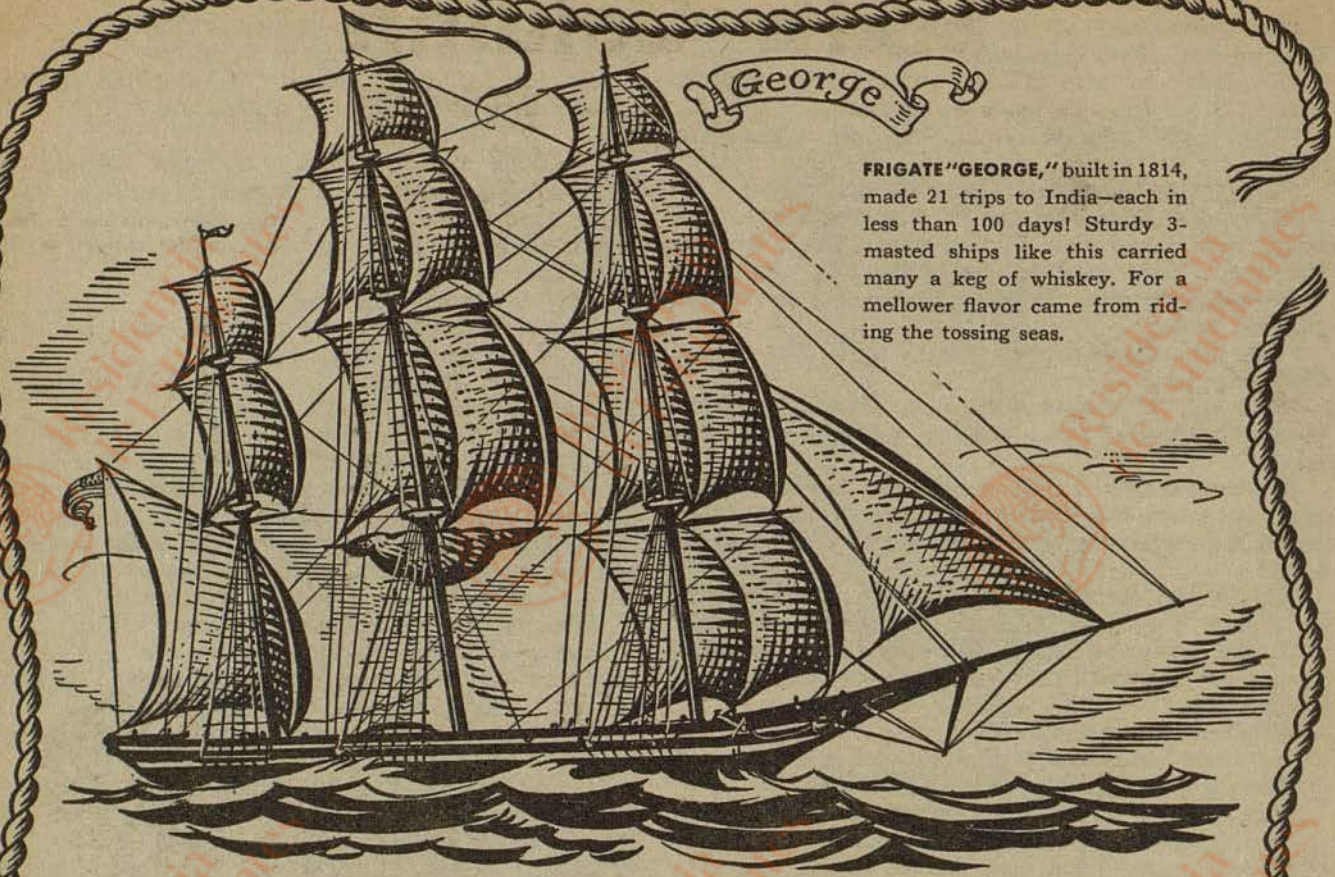
"What a waste," said O'Riley. "Goodnight. I hope I don't see either of you again soon."

He strolled away, humming gently to himself. Ellen and Bradley were left alone beside the pool.

"I haven't thanked you," she said. "I don't know how I can . . ."

Bradley smiled at her, and after a moment she smiled back.

THE END



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Sixth Column

The mucker slammed Peter Baroff into oblivion

By Borden Chase

Author of "His Sword Is Rust," "Farewell to the Indies," etc.

Peter Baroff was smart; he knew that the workers were being callously exploited. And he was strong; nothing would deter him from his duty to the Cause. But there was something stronger than Peter and his cleverness—a song that welled up within him, triumphantly

PETER Baroff smiled at them. They were his brothers. Each of the thirty men in this gang was a laborer who toiled with his hands, built things. Therefore, each was a brother to Peter Baroff. He watched them plodding across the yard to the elevators that waited at the top of the tunnel shaft.

They were big men. Their faces were shiny with the look that comes from soap and water. Their hands were huge and dangled at their sides. River mud was plastered thick upon their working clothes. It was caked on their boots and broke off in little pieces when they stamped their feet.

He heard them laugh and call to one another. They talked of the tunnel and boasted of their skill. Again Peter smiled at them. Soon he would teach these huge sandhogs the great truths he had learned. When he talked to them they would realize how foolish it was to laugh and shout while they were being herded like cattle to their day's work. They would no longer allow others to gather the fruit of their toil. They would revolt.

But that was for the future. Peter crowded onto the nearest elevator with ten other tunnel workers. His khaki trousers and shirt were new and spotless. His boots creaked and gripped his feet tightly as new boots will. This was his first day on the job and the immensity of it awed him a little.

The activity of the construction yard seemed as a swirl of thundering trucks, panting steam shovels and derricks that swung huge steel plates high in to the air and dropped them crashing onto stout wooden platforms. Foremen shouted orders to other gangs, whistles blared and shrieked, and always there was the sybilant hiss of rushing air as it whirled through the big black pipes to the tunnel below.

This tunnel—Peter Baroff knew all about it. That is, he knew why it was being built. It was a connecting link in the gigantic defense system spreading across the United States. When it was finished, trains loaded with supplies and war material could be quickly transferred from one freight terminal to another. Other trains loaded with soldiers could be rushed through it to take up defense positions wherever they were needed. Such was the story the newspapers told. Such was the propaganda spread by the militaristic government.

It was true that the Party supported the government now, claiming that the United States was a friend to Russia

and to the workers' cause. But Peter Baroff knew better; he knew that the Party leaders were fools, won over by capitalist propaganda. He, Peter Baroff, could not be deluded so easily; he understood that the great truths remained unchanged, that every enlightened worker must fight the robber capitalists. He served the blind Party no longer, but he served the Cause. He saw clearly, and he had a mission—to teach the truth to his brothers, to bind them together against the oppressors. This morning Peter Baroff would begin his mission.

A BELL rang and the elevator on which he was standing dropped suddenly below the ground level. Peter drew a deep breath and braced himself. The sunlight winked out and synthetic brilliance gleamed from dozens of electric lights.

The walls of the shaft were covered with moisture and a damp wind ruffled his shirt. The men huddled close to the center of the elevator and those at the edges locked arms for mutual protection. This was as it should be, thought Peter—each united to the other in solidarity.

There was a slight jar and the downward motion of the elevator stopped. Peter looked forward into the rounded mouth of the tunnel. A concrete bulkhead blocked the entrance to the tube and projecting through this heavy slab were the ends of three iron cylinders.

Peter had heard of these. They were the air locks. Small steel cars heaped with river sand were being trundled out of the largest of these locks and the men of his gang were crowding into another. He followed and seated himself on a long wooden bench as the others were doing. The foreman swung closed a heavy iron door and lifted his hand.

Peter had been warned of what would happen next. His good friend John Nuvasky had explained it in detail that morning. Nuvasky had been a sandhog for years and had worked on many such tunnel jobs beneath the rivers. He and his family lived on the same floor of that downtown tenement where Peter made his home. But John had not seemed too pleased when Peter had asked him for a place in his gang.

John was one of those hard-headed fellows who did not realize he was being exploited. He had been content to struggle along, taking the few pennies that were doled out to him and giving in exchange the very life from his body. He had warned Peter the work would be hard and dangerous and had cautioned him against talking too much about the workers' revolution.

But then, John knew nothing of the cause nor would he listen when Peter tried to educate him. He was not progressive. He was content to save a few dollars from his pittance and entrust it to a bank in the hope that the Nuvasky family would one day own a home of their own, and that young John would go to college.

There were many others like John—too many others. These sandhogs seemed to have no imagination and it was well that a man of clear vision had come to educate them. Peter Baroff felt a surge of pride as he realized that he stood alone, deserted by the Party. Alone he would unite these workers in the service of the Cause.

A screaming blast of air poured into the lock. Peter grasped his nose and blew to force the air into the upper passages of his head. Nuvasky had told him this would equalize the pressure and stop that pain in his ears. It was weird stuff, this compressed air. It could not be seen nor could you touch it, but it surged against the forward end of the tunnel and acted as a solid wall to hold back the river.

The tunnel was dipping far under the river bed and they were using forty pounds of this compressed air to keep out the water. It was a splendid tool but it did strange things to a man. Sometimes it crippled him or choked him. Once, Peter had seen John come staggering along the street like a drunken man, his face the color of mouldy bread and his lower lip gripped tightly between his teeth. The compressed air had done that.

But neither John nor the other sandhogs appeared to be thinking of such things now. Peter watched them as they stared at the rounded walls of the locks. They were stupid fellows, he thought; they needed his guidance.

HEAT filled the lock as the pressure lifted. It sent twisting streams of sweat down Peter's back. It dulled his mind and made him sluggish. When the heavy door at the forward end of the lock opened it was an effort to follow the gang out into the darkness of the tunnel.

Fog swept in folds about them. It drifted from the far end of the tube and with it came the clank of tools and the shouts of men. Peter wanted to talk. He wanted to tell these brothers of his what fools they were. Did they realize how stupid it was to work in the black hole beneath the river, risking their lives and their health for the sake of a few dollars while their employer laughed at them? Did they know they were being exploited by wealth? And this talk of defense—it was a lie! A trick!

Oh, there were many things he must tell them, but just now it was too hard to breathe, too hard to keep pace with the gang on that march to the tunnel end. There was a roaring in his ears and his chest was tight. He turned to his friend Nuvasky and John was smiling encouragement. He saw that others were stripping the shirts from their shoulders as they walked. Were they so anxious to get to their work that they could not spare the few minutes it would take to prepare? Ah! They were fools.

The dimly lit stretches of the tube gave way to a sudden brilliance. They were in the heading now—the spearhead of the tunnel where the work of building was going on. Peter looked at the gleaming steel drum that was called the shield. Nuvasky had told him of this, too. It was this monstrous piece of machinery that made tunneling possible. The forward end jutted into the river bed and formed a partial protection for the miners as they shoveled the sand away.

Peter could see these miners crouching at their work. Their backs were bare and wet with sweat. Their arms lifted and fell in steady cadence as the shovels bit into the sand. When the relieving gang stepped up to take over the work they did not even slow their strokes. Some grunted. Peter heard one miner curse and jerk a watch from his pocket. He saw him look at it in disgust as though loath to believe the shift was over. It was all very strange.

Above him, on a wooden platform that extended across the center line of the tunnel, a gang of giant blacks were tightening blots that held the iron segments of the tube. Huge wrenches flashed up and down in rhythmic strokes, lights gleamed on glistening ebony hides and the Negroes chanted a sing-song melody. He saw the men who had come in with him climb up the tunnel walls and take the wrenches from the hands of these toiling giants. There

"Brothers," Peter cried, "why must you be slaves?"

was scarcely a break in the rhythm of the strokes. A few words, a laugh and a thump on the back—that was all. Then the others were gone and the men of his gang had slipped into the routine. Slaves to the capitalists—the fools!

JOHN NUVASKY was beside him and he was pointing to a man who stood near a pile of sand. A shovel was clenched in the mucker's hands and he swept the sand into a small steel car drawn up at the tack ends.

"Take that shovel, Peter," said John. "That is your job."

"Good—that is good," said Peter. "First I must take off my shirt and then I will join my brothers."

"Your shirt should be off already," said John.

"Don't be such a fool. Why must we rush and—"

Peter was alone. John had climbed the tunnel wall and was peering over the backs of the miners, shouting orders and curses. Peter grinned and shrugged his shoulders. He removed his shirt and stepped up to the mucker at the sand pile.

"Give me your shovel, brother," he said. "It is my time to work and it is your time to rest. Give me the shovel."

"Ah, nuts," said the mucker.

He thrust the shovel at Peter, grabbed his shirt from a nearby bolt head and hurried up tunnel. Peter watched him go and shook his head sadly. These Irish were peculiar people. He had been ready to extend the hand of friendship to this heavy-chested laborer but the man had turned from him as if he were a machine. But when Peter Baroff talked to them they would realize that this was wrong. They would learn the great truths. They would revolt.

"Dig into it, Polack!" cried one of the gang.

Peter looked at him. The mucker was standing spraddle-legged at the far side of the sand pile. His shovel lifted and fell in sweeping strokes that sent the sand flying into a muck car. His teeth were clenched and the muscles writhed like turning ropes across his back.

"Dig into it, Polack," he said again.

"I am no Polack," said Peter. He frowned. "I am an American—we are all Americans."

"Is that supposed to be news?" shouted the mucker as his shovel dipped into the sand. "Get that damn car loaded. We're out for two and two this shift."

Two and two—oh, yes! John Nuvasky had told Peter of that. It was another scheme of the employers to wring work from the men. When a sufficient amount of sand had been removed, the shield was advanced thirty inches. A shove—that was what Nuvasky had called it. And then a circle of iron plates was bolted into place and that was a ring.

A shove and a ring was called "one and one" and the sandhogs raced to see which gang would get the most shoves and build the greatest number of rings each shift. It was a clever idea and one that was worthy of the group who lived on the labor of the masses.

"And what do we gain if we get two and two?" asked Peter.

"Gain? Hell, we lick the pants off Donagan's gang—that's what we gain. C'mon, mucker—swing that shovel!"

Peter dug at the sand. The compressed air wrapped about him like a heavy blanket. It made each movement an effort and moisture poured from his body in huge drops. Soon his hands grew warm and the tender skin in the palms pained a little. He dropped the point of his shovel and looked at his hands. A round white blister was forming in the center of each. He blew upon them and wiped the sweat from his eyes. Nuvasky was staring at him and Peter frowned.

"This is work for animals," he said.

"You asked for the job," answered John.

"It is not right that men should—"

NUVASKY wasn't listening. Instead, he was cursing at the motorman who was slow with the cars. Peter turned to the muck pile. All around him men were leaping to their work as if their very lives depended upon speed. He saw two muckers running toward the shield with a huge timber balanced upon their shoulders. The Negroes were leaping and howling as they swung their wrenches.

Sand poured from the shield as though swept by a cyclone. Laughter and curses mingled with the roar of air that howled from a pipe above the muck pile. It was a world gone mad and Peter stood amazed in the center of it. He saw black streams of water twisting from the bottom of the shield. A sudden curtain of fog dimmed the tunnel lights and left him alone, a silent figure in a mass of sound-filled white. The shovel seemed the only real thing in sight and he clutched it tightly.

Without realizing quite what he was doing, he dipped and swooped, sending the sand flying into a nearby muck car. His back was a mass of pain, his hands were hot and his throat was dry. Nuvasky came striding out of the mist and brushed him aside.

"Ready for the shove!"

That was his friend John who howled like a demon and seemed to be in many places at one time. There were more shouts. The muck cars were dragged away into darkness and half-naked figures dashed madly past him. The fog lifted a little and he stared at the gleaming steel of the shield.

A man was stationed in the center of the ponderous piece of mechanism. He twisted levers and valves. The entire shell of the tunnel trembled and groaned. Two Negroes shouted meaningless numbers and from the back of the shield, a circle of gleaming pistons forced out against the last ring of iron.

The men were cursing and shouting. John Nuvasky was leaping about and howling orders. The shield moved slowly forward and water gurgled into the tunnel. When he looked up, Peter saw the giant blacks stuffing bags around the edge of the shield to conserve the precious air. They were plugging up the leaks and laughing as they worked. He leaned against the tunnel wall. There was a scream of brakes and a shout of warning. He leaped wildly and the motor crashed by dragging a string of small flat cars on which were iron plates for a new ring.

"All over!"

That was Nuvasky again. Silence gripped the tunnel. Peter drew a deep breath. His self-assurance was returning and he stepped to the side of a mucker near a flat car.

"The work is finished, eh?" he asked.

"Finished?" shouted the mucker and there was laughter in his voice. "Hell, Polack—that's only one and one."

Peter would have told him again that he was an American, but the mucker was gone. Nuvasky was at his side and he was pointing to a pile of cement bags.

"Lend a hand, Peter," he said. "Get 'em up on the platform."

Driven like animals, Peter thought; and for what? But he turned to the bags.

There followed an agony of bending and lifting. The white powder blew into his eyes and burned like acid. The coarse fabric of the bags tore open the blisters and the palms of his hands became cups of flame. He paused to ease the ache in his back and someone cursed him. He was glad when Nuvasky pointed to his shovel and nodded.

One-hour shifts in forty pounds of air—that was what Nuvasky had told him. One hour in this hell below the river and six hours of rest before the next shift. But it seemed like a year. His movements with the shovel had become mechanical—a forward dip that started the pain throbbing up from his hips—a lift that tore at his stomach muscles—a swing that sent the sand into the muck car and concentrated the whole agony of pain in his shoulders. When a grinning sandhog stepped beside him and took the shovel from his hands he swayed and would have fallen had he not gripped the side of a car.

The others of the gang were cursing as they walked up the tunnel to the locks.

"Could have made two and two," said one.

"Damn Polack held us back," said another.

Peter looked at them. They were frowning at him and one man spat in his direction. Nuvasky said nothing. They went crouching into the lock and the door was closed.

THE shift was over—Peter's first shift in a tunnel below a river. He seated himself on the long wooden bench and leaned back against the round wall of the lock. He was tired and every inch of his body throbbed and jumped like a tooth that needed pulling. But he had proved himself a fit brother to these laborers. He was one of them. Now they must listen to the great truths he had come to tell them.

"Brothers," he said and he lifted an arm, "why must you be slaves? You toil but you—"

"Ah, shut up," growled a mucker. It was that same heavy-chested Irishman who had worked across the sand pile from Peter.

"It is my right to talk," said Peter. "I—Peter Baroff, your brother in toil, will—"

"You'll shut up or get shut," said another. "We'd have made that second shovel except for you."

"Shove! Shove! Who cares about a shove?" cried Peter.

There was a silence and Peter felt the eyes of thirty men upon him. Those dark brothers of his, the Negroes, seemed incredulous. Their mouths were open, their lips drawn back from white teeth in surprise.

"Fellah," said one, "we'h buildin' for defense!"

Peter turned from him to the muckers and saw anger in their faces. A miner spat. John Nuvasky handed Peter a leather jacket.

"Put this around your shoulders, Peter," he said. "Keep warm—and keep quiet."

There was no sound but the whisper of air as it leaked through the partially opened valve. Peter felt the pressure draining from his body and he remembered some of the things his friend John had told him. This was the decompression period. The gang must spend forty minutes in this lock while the pressure was gradually lowered. A too-sudden change would bring the bends or that frightful paralysis that crippled and killed. He drew the coat about his shoulders and stared at the men. They were watching him, measuring him with their eyes.

Nuvasky had often spoken of this decompression period as a time for laughter and rough pranks. He had told Peter that the sandhogs considered the man lock as their court of law. Those who had made mistakes in the tunnel were tried by the gang and sentence was passed by the foreman.

Punishment took the form of so many strokes with a stout wooden paddle that hung near the door of the lock. It was all a great game played by the sandhogs but there

was an under-current of seriousness attached to it. It was as though these men who worked in a world of their own must take their own laws and enforce them. Peter had laughed at that.

He waited for the first word of condemnation. He looked at the mucked who had called him a shirker. Surely the man would now accuse him in open court. And when he did, Peter would plead guilty and join their little game. Perhaps that would unite him more firmly to the gang.

"I worked too slowly, eh?" he said and grinned.

There was no answer. A miner yawned and closed his eyes. A mucker drew a greasy pack of cards from his jacket and a silent game of poker was started. Nuvasky was biting at a broken thumbnail.

What sullen clods they were. Men with the minds of little children. They had been racing to get two shoves and two rings and in this way do more work than another gang of stupid fools.

Ah, the poor blind fools! They thought they were helping to defend their country! Why could they not see it was only a trick of the employers? Didn't they realize how they were being exploited? He *must* tell them.

"Listen to me, brothers," he said. "Let us unite and stop this foolish racing. Let me show you how we can better ourselves."

A warm stream of tobacco juice splattered against his cheek. He turned. His fists doubled and there was anger in his eyes. He stared at the faces of the men nearest. All were busy with their self-appointed tasks.

"Who did that?" he demanded.

There was no answer. A mucker scratched his ear.

"Coward!" cried Peter. "I will fight the man who did that. Yes, even though he is my brother, I will fight."

"Go to hell," said a miner.

"Are your shoulders warm?" asked John Nuvasky. "You must not get a chill—it brings on the bends."

Peter turned the collar of the jacket high about his throat. The tobacco juice twisted down his cheek and ran along the side of his neck. He did not feel it. He was puzzled—bewildered. Why was he treated like a leper? Why did they scorn him? He stared about him, defiant, angry. The air sighed through the valve and the pressure lowered.

"You're out," said Nuvasky at length.

THE outer door opened and the gang straggled from the lock. They walked silently to the elevators and huddled in the center of each. Peter was at the edge. He lifted his arm to place it about the shoulder of the man next to him. The mucker shrugged it away.

The sunlight was good after that hour of blackness. Peter stretched his arms and bared his chest to it when he walked across the yard. His friend Nuvasky had gone to the company office to make a report of the work done on the shift and Peter watched the men of the gang.

Some wandered into a nearby restaurant and slammed the door with great force. Others found comfortable places on bales of hay and sunned themselves. Peter watched the Irishman who had worked across the muck pile from him. He was talking to a group of sandhogs from another shift and they were laughing. It seemed to Peter that they were laughing at him.

"You fools," he shouted. "It is I who laugh. I laugh at you because you do not know you are being tricked—exploited."

He saw the mucker turn and walk toward him. He watched those stubby fingers ball into a fist. And he saw the fist streaking toward his jaw. He tried to dodge and lift his arms but he was too late. Blackness smothered him and he fell.

. . . Nuvasky was pouring water on his face from a rusty tin can and it was making cold puddles on his chest. He thrust back at the ground with his elbows and lifted to a sitting position. He stared about and the construction yard was a strange place.

"All right now, eh?" said John. "Just take it easy and rest. I'll find another man to take your place on the next shift."

"Next shift?" said Peter. "Oh, the next shift, yes. How soon is it?"

"A few hours. But don't worry. Sleep a while."

"Yes," said Peter. "I will sleep."

His dreams were not pleasant things. Always when the great day came and the workers triumphed, a grim jawed Irishman with red hair matted thick on his chest would step forward with uplifted fist. A thousand times Peter saw himself lifted to the shoulders of a cheering group of his brothers and just so often did that heavy fist lift before his eyes. He turned and twisted. Steel tipped whips lashed his back. A jeering gang of sandhogs were flaying the flesh from his shoulders. He screamed and sat upright.

The sun was lower in the sky and he saw a group of men walking toward the elevators. John Nuvasky was with them. It was Peter's gang. They were going without him.

He crawled to his knees. Every muscle and joint was afire. He staggered erect and lurched like a man heavy with liquor. Nuvasky tried to push him aside when he crowded onto the elevator. Peter cursed him and stepped onto the platform. The bell rang and the sunlight was gone.

The walk down the tunnel was a parade of phantoms. Peter heard the stamp of his own boots and the swish of sand on his trouser legs. He blinked at the bright lights of the tunnel heading and reached to take a shovel from the hands of a sweating mucker. Across the sand pile was the man who had hit him. He was laughing at Peter as he swung the sand into a muck car. Peter matched his strokes, shovel for shovel and bit his lips to keep from screaming. It was a test. He, Peter Baroff of the clear vision, would show this fool what a man could do. He would keep pace.

The work in the tunnel swept round him unnoticed. The shouts and curses drifted into nothingness. The fog was gone. The pressure of the air no longer bothered him. Nothing was important except that his shovel must dip and swing each time that other shovel moved. The sand pile became his world. It was an enemy that must be fought with a shovel.

He timed his movements to a song—a noiseless song that was played in his mind. It was a song that was heard at planting time. Peter forgot about the tunnel. He saw a wide, sunbaked plain of brown earth. It was hard earth, stubborn earth. He and the other peasants were turning this earth with crude, home-fashioned shovels.

Peter was young, then, just a boy in years but already wide-shouldered and strong. He was turning the earth of the fields with other youths. And he was a far better worker than any. He was the best worker in the district.

THAT other shovel was going faster now. Peter increased the tempo of his song. Words were slipping through his teeth. He was singing aloud. His shovel was dipping and swinging. It kept the time of the song. It was a mad song. It raced and raced, grew louder and faster as the shovels dipped. His eyes were blinded with sweat. There was blood on the shovel.

But the song kept on and Peter swung to the tune: *This is my home—my home that I love—my home I will fight for and defend—"*

Someone was tearing at his shovel. They wanted it. They were trying to stop the song. But Peter shouted the words aloud and ripped into the sand with the point of the blade: *"This is my home—I will fight for and defend—"* and then, caught by a sudden surge, he added one word. *"This is my home,"* sang Peter. *" This is my home —America!"*

He shouted it, triumphantly.

Other hands were gripping his arms. Men were shouting. They laughed and wrapped their arms about him. He looked across the muck pile and saw a man stretched on the floor. It was the Irishman and his arms were out and his chest was heaving.

"Good, Peter—good!" shouted his friend Nuvasky.

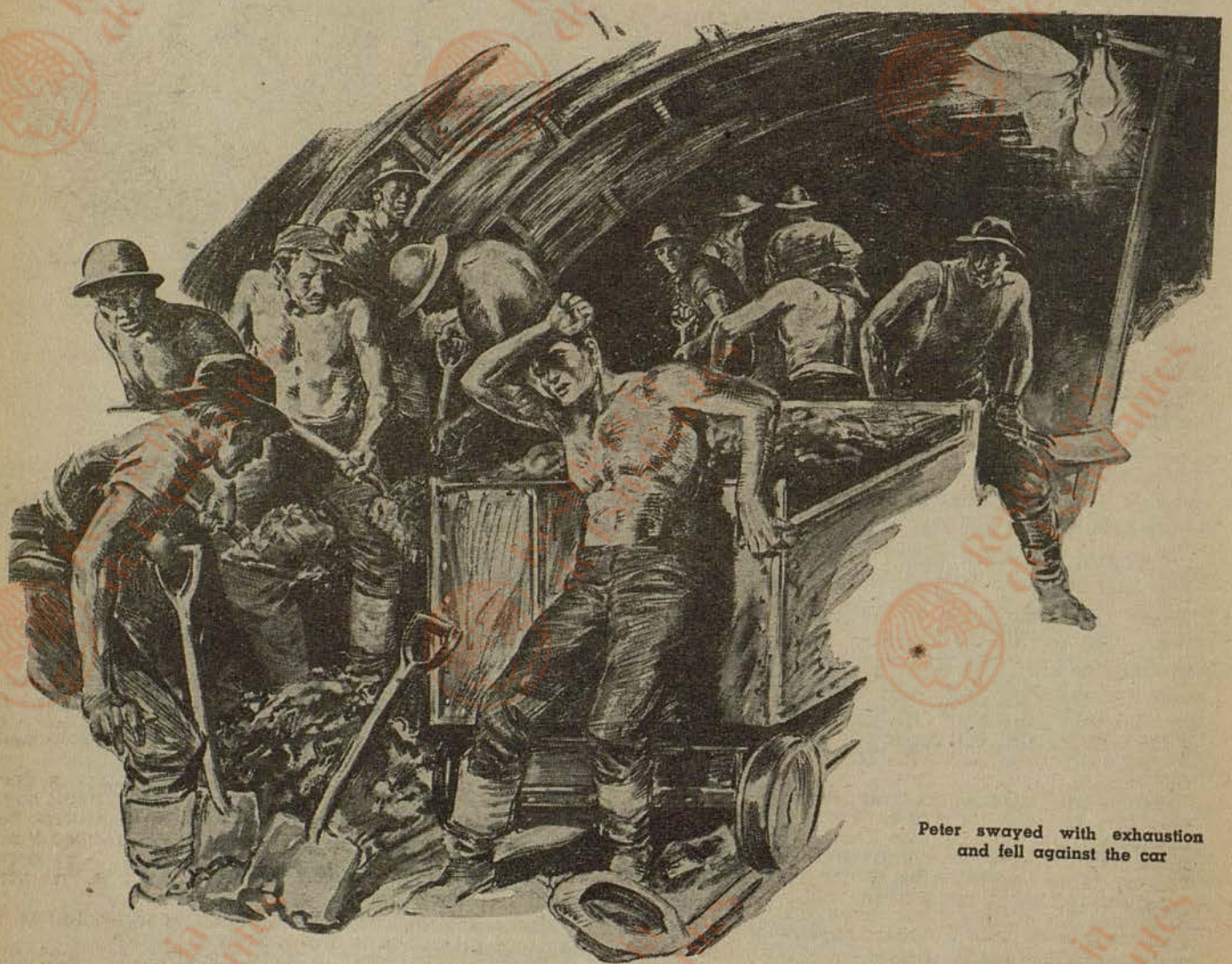
What was good? Why did they stop him? Why did they stop his song? Because the Irishman had fallen? Was it? Ho! They were fools. They should know that no man could stand against Peter Baroff when he worked and sang.

They were walking to the lock now. The shift must be over. And the men were laughing and shouting. There were warm hands on his back and warm breaths beating against his face.

"Two and two!" shouted a mucker. "We made it!"

"Thanks to Peter—good man, Peter," said another.

So that was it, eh? Two and two. And they were laughing and thought it was great. They were stumbling all over themselves as they climbed into the lock and Peter was being pummeled.



Peter swayed with exhaustion and fell against the car

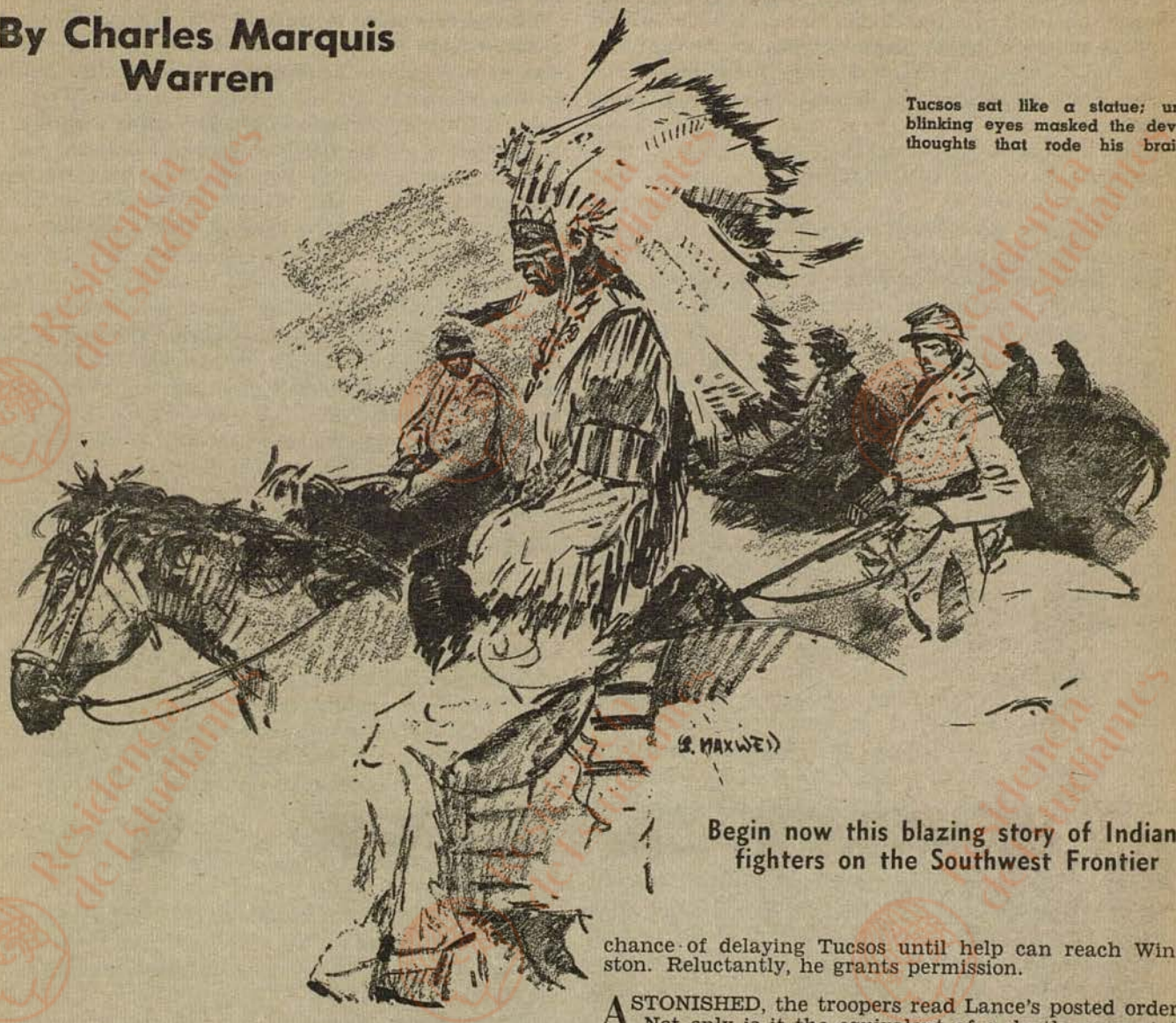
When the door was closed and the air whispered out, Peter sat erect on the wooden bench. He looked about him and stared at the others of the gang. All were silent. They looked at him and waited. He smiled. It was his time to talk. They were waiting for him to talk.

But what was this he was saying? The words sounded loud in his ears. They leaped from his throat as had that song. They spoke themselves and Peter sat as though listening.

"Two and two, eh?" he heard this strange Peter say. "You think that is something? Wait—wait until Peter Baroff sings his song again. Then we will build and build to defend this home of ours! I—Peter Baroff say it! I, Peter Baroff—the *American!"*

Only the Valiant

By Charles Marquis Warren



Tucsos sat like a statue; unblinking eyes masked the devil thoughts that rode his brain

Begin now this blazing story of Indian-fighters on the Southwest Frontier

FORT WINSTON, outpost in the great Southwest Territory, is threatened with attack by Apaches led by the vengeful and wily TUCSOS. Pending the arrival of exchange troops from Fort Grant, Winston is garrisoned only by a skeleton force of cavalry and infantry forces, headed by CAPTAIN RICHARD LANCE and CAPTAIN EVERSHAM, respectively. It's commanding officer, COLONEL DRUMM, is incapacitated by recurrent illness.

As a sign that Tucsos and his warriors are preparing to strike, the hideously mutilated body of LIEUTENANT BILL HOLLOWAY, for two years captive of the Apaches, is delivered to the fort. Lance blames himself for what has happened to Holloway, once his closest friend; and knows that everyone at Winston blames him too. He is well aware of being the most hated man at the post.

SCOUT JOE HARMONY, whose close affection for Lance has turned to grim disapproval because of Holloway's death, reminds Lance that Tucsos had promised to send Holloway in before he came himself. "Tucsos is gettin' ready. And he'll come before the exchange troops can git here," is Harmony's warning.

Mindful of this, Lance proposes a voluntary and suicidal expedition to Fort Invincible, all but destroyed in Tucsos' uprising two years before. Nevertheless, the redout still stands and the abandoned Invincible is strategically situated to guard the pass through which Tucsos' attack must come. Lance's proposal is a fantastic gesture, but Drumm feels that it has a slight chance of delaying Tucsos until help can reach Winston. Reluctantly, he grants permission.

ASTONISHED, the troopers read Lance's posted order. Not only is it the equivalent of a death warrant to every man assigned to the detail, but, with one exception, every one of those men has good cause to wish Lance dead. They are:

LIEUTENANT JERRY WINTERS, who bears Lance a deep and secret grudge dating back to their West Point days. Furthermore, since his transfer to the Southwest because of an infected lung, his warped and twisted brain has conceived a gnawing jealousy of Lance. Jerry accurately senses that his bride Cathy is falling in love with his brother officer;

SERGEANT MURDOCK, bitterly aware that his failure to achieve promotion is due entirely to Lance;

CORPORAL GILCHRIST, a fantastically brave and able soldier, and as fantastically confirmed and insatiable drunkard, who is certain that Lance's order cutting liquor rations was aimed deliberately at him;

TRUMPETER SAXTON, who knows that Lance alone has blocked his youthful ambition to exchange his bugle for a sabre;

TROOPER KEBUSSYAN, the half-insane Armenian, who cherishes the delusion that Lance is but another incarnation of the fiendish Abdul Hamid who massacred Kebussyan's people;

TROOPER ONSTOT, transferred from a Federal prison to the ranks of the Army of the Frontier, whose attempt at desertion was foiled by Lance;

TROOPER RUTLEDGE, bookish and inscrutable, who feels that Lance's fanatic devotion to duty had caused his

This story began in the last issue of the Argosy

dismissal from West Point, where he was Lance's classmate; and

Scout Joe Harmony. Only JUNIOR-SERGEANT TOMKINS bears Lance no ill-will.

It is Sergeant Murdock who voices the thoughts of the others when he grimly prophesies that Lance, in any case, will never return alive.

"If them 'Paches don't take care of him, one of us will. . . ."

CHAPTER VII

TOMORROW WE MARCH

LIEUTENANT WINTERS always waited until Cathy's candle was extinguished before divesting himself of his uniform. He did this, not because of modesty, but because he was ashamed of his body. The thin shoulders, the lack of biceps even when he flexed his arms, the concave chest and the scrawny legs tormented him until it seemed that the ill health which had attacked his lungs and emaciated his frame had left his face unravaged for the sole purpose of concealing his condition from everyone except his wife.

He poured himself a last drink and stood at the window savoring the abatement of pain the whiskey brought to his chest. He thought of Bill Holloway lying outside the post and he had to shake his head sharply to disperse the brief, self-pitying envy that came over him.

Holloway had been in Lance's class at the Point, two classes above Jerry, but there had been no bond between them and himself. In fact, he had been relieved upon arriving at Winston to learn that Holloway had been taken by Tucsos and that, because of that, the number of handsome men Cathy would meet had been reduced by one.

But he lifted his glass and murmured, "Goodnight, Holloway, and many thanks;" for he realized he owed the dead man gratitude for serving to bring disgrace upon Richard Lance. The very fact that Holloway's capture and death had been the direct fault of Lance's cowardice brought Winters closer to him than he had ever been while Holloway lived.

He crossed the floor and his hand touched the foot of the bed and guided him around to his side. He sat on the edge and said, "Cathy." He heard her breathing but she did not answer. She wasn't asleep. "You hear me?"

He felt her stir. "Yes, Jerry."

"I know what he's up to, taking me out on that patrol tomorrow! I tell you, reading the list of men making up that detail is like taking a vote on who hates him the most."

"Don't talk it about, Jerry. We've been all over it. Captain Lance knows what he's doing."

"Oh he does, does he? Is that the way you feel?"

He heard her draw a breath. "Perhaps you won't have to bother forcing yourself to pretend to care for me, after tomorrow. Perhaps that's what he has in mind."

"Jerry!"

"You said he knew what he was doing."

"He wouldn't. . . He isn't that kind."

"He's perfect, isn't he? To you he's perfect."

He coughed, and swore. He held a clean handkerchief to his mouth. "There hasn't been anything for a week. I'm much better."

"It's this climate," she said. "It's finally taking effect."

"You don't believe me. I feel better." The handkerchiefs that had had the slightest stain upon them he had been disposing of secretly for the past week.

"Listen," he said. "I know why he's taking me out on a detail when everyone knows the entire Territory is flooded with Indians in paint. But I won't die. I won't let him kill me or get me killed. I won't let it be that easy for him. Just remember this: there's plenty of chances out there for things to happen two ways; and if I die I'll take him with me. You hear that? I'll take him with me."

He felt her trembling. Then she said in a low, calm voice, "Jerry, have you thought that he might be doing it for just the opposite reason? That he might . . . want it to happen to himself? There hasn't been much for him since Lieutenant Holloway was taken. The men feeling the way they do, feeling the way he probably does himself. . . . Perhaps he doesn't want anything to happen to anyone but himself."

He heard the ragged edge of her tone as she said these words.

"I hadn't thought of it like that."

He propped himself on his elbows. He began thinking about it like that. . . .

HAIK KEBUSSYAN made no attempt to sleep. By standing on tiptoe and gripping the bars with his hands he could lift his face nearly to the small window and so remove his nose as far as possible from the stench and filth of the guardhouse.

That the guardhouse was neither odorous nor dirty was a fact that escaped the Armenian, whose instinct informed him that he had again been committed to the horror-hole in Deir ez-Zor.

Kebussyan swore and once or twice he screamed in his rage and this brought a soldier walking his beat outside to the window.

"Pipe that lousy screeching down, Arab." Kebussyan roared in his own language. "Listen, you crazy mule's son, get down from them bars before I call the cor'pral of the guard. You hear me?"

This galvanized Kebussyan to a rage and strength that he himself had been unaware of. His great fists knotted about the bars and there was a wrenching sound of loosened plaster and the soldier stared in surprise, saying "I'm a mule's son myself," and hammered at Kebussyan's fists with the butt of his rifle until their grip was broken.

A craftiness settled in Kebussyan's mind and he decided that it was to his advantage to remain quiet. He might even overcome his revulsion and attempt to sleep. He helped lull his anger by remembering that he had given both Talaat Pasha and Abdul Hamid every conceivable benefit of doubt and they had proven unalterably that they were not really Joe Harmony and Captain Lance at all. They must both die and he was the one to see to it. And because he was a stickler for caste, he chose Captain Lance to go first. . . .

. . . Lance sat by the window and rubbed out his fifth consecutive cigarette in the clay saucer upon the table. He groped for the untouched drink, turning it slowly, feeling the heat his palm imparted to the glass and feeling the small agitation that came to his stomach at the idea of drinking the warm whiskey.

It was maddening not to be able to sleep when it was what his body and nerves required more than anything

else. For a long time he sat still, the moonlight gradually creeping across the room until it illumined Bill Holloway, sitting on the chair by the bunk, his legs sprawled out, a drink in his hand, his teeth looking chalk-white because he was grinning at Lance.

"Hi," Bill said. "Hi, Dick."

Lance said, "You never seem to look any older."

"It's the liquor. It keeps you working so hard to digest it you don't have time to age."

"It must be. You look fine."

"I feel fine. I always feel fine, Dick. The fun of living is the fun you get out of living."

"Yes."

Bill laughed, making no sound. "Dick, the trouble with you is you aren't a runner. You're a plodder. I'll bet my month's pay on the plodder every time. That's common sense. But who wants to be a plodder? Take how you feel about Cathy Winters for instance—"

"She's Jerry Winters' wife."

"There you are. A plodding honesty."

"You remember Winters at the Point."

"A yearling."

"Yes. Do you know what happened? About Jerry and his brother, I mean?"

"Yes, I know now."

"Well, how would it look if I went after his wife?"

"Who would look at it? A gentleman considers the lady's feelings. You want her to continue being unhappy?"

"A gentleman tries not to be a thief. Anyway, never mind about Cathy." He peered hard at Bill and swallowed once in an endeavor to clear all sentiment from his tone. "Bill, did they . . . did they hurt you very much? Did you finally come to hate me? Did knowing it was my fault make it hurt less . . . or more?"

THE question must have offended Holloway. He stood up, balancing his drink in one hand and clearing his saber straps from the skirts of his coat with the other.

Lance waited. It seemed to him his chest would burst from the breath he had confined in it. Finally he could stand it no longer. "Bill, answer me. How was it with you . . . and me . . . during these two years, and when they did things—"

He saw there was no use pressing his question because Holloway had evinced his complete disinterest by leaving. The chair was empty and there was a darkly glistening spot on it where Bill had probably spilled his drink. He went over and examined it and made certain it was a smoothly worn boot-polish stain.

He felt suddenly tired. Now he might sleep and refresh himself for the detail he was leading out at dawn.

His sleep was profound and he did not hear the sentries begin to call loudly to each other, nor the bawling voice of Captain Eversham, nor the sharp commands of a sullen corporal of the guard.

A sort of orderly confusion was flowing into the post. Out of the night, from every direction, life slipped into this Mecca on foot, creaked in aboard double-teamed Conestogas and Mitchells, rode in noisily astride big work-hardened horses and wiry plains ponies.

There was no tangible reason for this influx; no one of its members, if asked, could have supplied a direct answer as to why he and his family sought shelter from something they had received no sign of.

"Absalom King tole me," they would have said. "He got it from Davy Pritchard an' Davy says his ole woman caught holt of it from Cal Llewellyn and Cal from Tobiah Tracy an' the Lord knows where Tobiah heerd it. That's as fer back as I can git. But it's time to git movin' though nobody ain't claimed to see any signs, fer as I know. . . ."

But if anyone had asked Joe Harmony, who sat up in his straw bed beside Koko's stall, Joe would have had his nizy answer for them.

"It's his men of wisdom sendin' their thoughts," he would have said. "They're conditioning us with their thoughts and the rhythm of their drums and that's how it is."

But no one asked Joe Harmony because most people thought of him as a desert beast who'd lived too long among the Apaches in his youth and who was apt to mix up what he'd learned with what he'd heard about voodoo or those bush blacks in Africa.

And all night they continued to come in, seemingly impelled to this common point by an unknown driver, like excitedly lowing stock herder into an unsuspected abattoir. And Joe Harmony, knowing much about such things, nodded his head.

For the mysterious telegraph of desert and prairie is there for a few to hear, as the singing of high wind is heard by those who have the ear for it. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

SOLDIERS DIE FROM BULLETS

THE GREY-WASHED minutes before dawn held little of the customary excitement which accompanied the departure of a patrol, yet many had turned out before reveille to view the leavetaking of this skeleton command. They stood at the edge of the parade, mostly cavalrymen, although the curiosity that attends men going deliberately to death had induced a number of the infantry to hike themselves from their bunks to take a look at faces they would not see again.

Some distance apart, a few women were huddled. There was Faith Taggart, Trumpeter Saxton's young fiancée; Betty Tomkins, whose pride in her husband's new sergeant's stripes bought with a concern that made her lips quiver; Frailty Prescott, a comely, big girl whose father ran the post store and whose interest in Corporal Gilchrist began at the moment she had first sneaked him a drink over the regulation liquor ration.

A short distance away the officers' wives stood, Celia Drumm and Cathy Winters. Mrs. Drumm's bonnet concealed all of her face but her lips, which smiled cryptically as she glanced from Cathy Winters to the detail.

"It's most strange," she said. "Why should Captain Lance select those particular men, I wonder?"

Cathy answered quietly:

"Perhaps because they are best suited for this patrol, Mrs. Drumm."

"But it's such waste, sending them all to their dea—" She broke off and peered hard at Cathy and said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean . . . I mean, your Jerry being in the detail. . . It was thoughtless. . . ." Her face took on a show of confusion.

"It's all right, Mrs. Drumm." Cathy's voice was without tone. "I'm not oblivious to the rumors."

The impossible had been done: the mighty Apache chieftain had been captured

"What rumors?" Mrs. Drumm asked sharply.

Cathy turned to look at her evenly. "The rumors which have circulated in the post; that Captain Lance has included these men in his detail each for a particular reason. And that the reasons are not pleasant."

"Oh, nonsense." But Celia Drumm's tone said in effect, *Oh, so you know it too?*

"But I'm certain," Cathy said, "that such is not the case. Captain Lance isn't petty. Nor foolhardy. His record shows—" She realized she had overstepped herself and felt the color rushing into her cheeks.

"You don't have to be reticent with me, Cathy, my dear." She's pretty, Mrs. Drumm thought enviously; she's more than that—she's beautiful.

And spitefully she decided that Cathy Winters' beauty would never bring her happiness. Not with Jerry Winters alive and with Richard Lance possessed by his excessive sense of honor. She wondered if Lance really had in mind remedying the situation, and how long it would be before he got around to killing Lieutenant Winters.

Captain Lance crossed the parade. The men stood beside their mounts, reins in their hands. Only Lieutenant Winters was seated, his horse sidling a bit under him. Joe Harmony busied himself adjusting Koko's girth, swearing soft endearments in the Blackfoot language.

As Lance's eyes fell upon Cathy Winters, he saw the expression on her face—turned suddenly toward him—and saw her take a step in his direction.

He raised his gauntlet to his hat in an impersonal gesture that included Mrs. Drumm, and kept walking until he came to the detail, where his striker handed over the reins, saluting.

Lance looked over the command. At the tail there were two pack-horses laden with ammunition and rations. Lance thought, *It's hardly a column. It's a hell of a command.*

The men were looking at him, obliquely, inspecting him with casual appraisal. You could never get inside their minds when they didn't want you to. He was conscious of Lieutenant Winters' half quizzical, half amused stare, and then he heard Winters cough, and knew that Winters was embarrassed and annoyed.

Joe Harmony straightened, looked at Lance, looked away. In the old days he'd have said, "You reckon now, Dick?" and Lance would have answered, "I reckon now, Joe," and they would have both grinned and the column would be off. Now Harmony looked away, preoccupied.

Lance took to his saddle, and looked across the parade—cluttered with wagons and temporary camps of the frontier families that had swelled the population of the post to ten times its usual number. Then he turned and murmured a command that swung the men into their saddles.

Raising his hand, he looked at Trumpeter Saxton who rode into position immediately behind Lieutenant Winters and himself. "All right, Johnny."

He dropped his hand and at the same time Saxton's trumpet gave forth a muted *Forward* and the detail began to canter across the parade.

Before the column reached the gate most of the men had turned in their saddles and lifted a hand in an answering wave to the group of women at the side of the parade.

Lieutenant Winters did not look back until the gate had been reached; then he lifted his hand to his hatbrim and brought it down slowly and watched his wife until she too raised her hand.

Joe Harmony looked over his scrawny shoulder once, at the new encampments. Then he gave Koko's neck a pat, man and animal apparently relieved as they passed through the gate.

Of the detail, only Lance had not once looked back.

CELIA DRUMM watched the sentries close the gate. "I declare," she said. "I declare." Perceiving that this cryptic remark had aroused no curiosity in Cathy Winters, she proceeded: "What can he be thinking of?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Drumm. I didn't hear."

"There, you poor thing. Of course it takes you hard, watching Jerry ride off like this. Why should Captain Lance include him in this extraordinary patrol?" She peered sharply at Cathy. "He's not fit for this duty."

Cathy looked at her wearily.

Mrs. Drumm made a comforting smile. "You poor dear," she said.

The other women had departed. The men were moving toward their barracks.

"Here, take my arm. I'll walk to your quarters with you."

"You're very kind, but it's no trouble—"

"Nonsense. Here, walk slowly. You don't mind my talking? I hope not. This thing is all mixed up in my head. Listening will take your mind off yourself and Jerry."

"If you don't mind, I'd—"

She took a firm hold on Cathy's arm. "Now, there isn't one sane reason why Richard should take one of those scalawags—of course I'm excepting your husband when I employ that term, my dear; you know that, of course." Mrs. Drumm spoke of Trumpeter Saxton and Sergeant Murdock and why they had cause to hate Dick Lance. "You see, don't you?"

"Yes," Cathy said. The steps to her 'dobe looked an inestimable distance. "Could we hurry a bit, Mrs. Drumm?"

"You mustn't excite yourself, my dear. And consider Trooper Onstot. A man who was a prisoner of the Union, dispatched to fight here against his will. A man made so miserable by Sergeant Murdock that he deserted, and would have gone free had not Richard and Joe Harmony tracked him to Oraibi. Why they didn't shoot him shows the need for men out here, I suppose, but do you think Onstot will ever forgive Richard?"

The steps were invitingly close. "Please, Mrs. Drumm, I can't—"

"But you must, my dear. It's essential. Your own husband rides in this patrol. Your husband and—"

Cathy looked up. "And what, Mrs. Drumm?"

"And your friend, Richard, of course. Your and Jerry's good friend."

"Yes, our friend." She was suddenly alive and although they had reached the steps she made no move to ascend.

CATHY SENSED what Celia Drumm was leading up to. She said quietly, "Go on, Mrs. Drumm. You haven't covered the remainder of the detail."

Celia Drumm looked at her in some confusion. "Oh, but of course I haven't. There is Sergeant Tomkins. A fine young man, Harkness tells me."

"We both know I didn't mean Tomkins, Mrs. Drumm."

Celia Drumm put her fingers to her lips, raising her eyes.

"You informed me that each man in this detail has reason to hate Captain Lance. My husband is in this detail. Tell me why, please, you believe my husband has reason to hate Captain Lance."

Celia Drumm had difficulty centering her eyes upon Cathy's. "Now, Cathy. . . I'm no scandalmonger, my dear."

"I have requested it."

The other woman's face was suddenly shot with anger. "Are you doubting that I don't know what every decent woman in this post knows?"

Cathy's cheeks had lost their color. Her voice was even. "Will you explain that, please?"

"Just this: both Richard and Jerry have a reason to wish each other dead, and their reason isn't standing more than two feet from me!"

Cathy slowly released her breath.

Celia Drumm, her triumph glowing within her, plunged further. "And I'll tell you something else, something that no one knows but Dr. Jennings and me. It's about Captain Lance. It's very intimate. Do you want to hear it?"

"No," Cathy said faintly.

"Captain Lance is afflicted with an incurable disease!" Celia Drumm's voice shook exultantly. "Now do you want to hear?"

Cathy paused, her back to the older woman. "Yes," she said dully.

Celia Drumm had begun to breathe quickly.

"It's got to do with me too, in a way," she said. "You most likely know I'm a good deal younger than Harkness. And now that he's as old as he is it doesn't bother him so much my not having given him a son. You didn't know I nearly had a child before we came here, did you? I lost it. When we first arrived here Harkness wanted me to— Well, I went to Dr. Jennings and got him to tell Harkness I couldn't have another child. But Dr. Jennings never told him that the real reason I couldn't was because the first time scared me out of my wits. I never got over the fright. I never will. That's the way pain reacts on you sometimes.

"Dr. Jennings said he understood how it was because he'd just got over examining another case. Before he thought, he told me about Captain Lance coming fresh from West Point and looking at those horrible things up there when Fort Invincible was massacred. Dr. Jennings made me promise I'd never mention what he'd told me and I never have till now. But I thought you ought to be told and now I've told you."

Cathy only stared at her, and after a moment Celia Drumm lowered her eyes.

"So I understand how it is with Richard," Celia Drumm said, her voice more quiet now. "Because we're both incurable. He should never be leading that patrol to Invincible. Like me, he's deathly afraid . . . but in a man they call it cowardice."

CHAPTER IX

HALT IN THE SHADE

AT SUNUP of the second day after leaving Winston, the detail rode up through the broken table land which flung itself out of the Flintheads in endless clutterings of buttes and flinty stringers.

By noon the heat was intolerable and the sun began to scorch through the regulation blouses. Lance kept his eye out for a site that would afford any shade while they made a quick midday meal, but before he had discovered such a spot Joe Harmony—twenty yards in the van—halted his horse and waited for Lance.

The scout nodded his head, giving a limp gesture with his finger toward the gray-brown range before them. "There," he said.

Lance rose and turned in his stirrups, lifting his arm. "Detaill-ll . . . *halt!*"

He heard the dry, leathery blowing of the horses as they lowered their heads immediately their legs ceased moving, and the hoarse clearing of throats as the men sat immobile, their eyes fixed upon the ears of their mounts.

For a moment there was silence, broken only by the switching of tails, and then Sergeant Murdock's raspy voice tore backward along the column.

"Leave them canteens alone! Onstot, drop your hand off that water-bottle! Anybody give you permission to drink?"

Lance nodded. "That's right, Sergeant. When we break for mess pass the word to measure the drinks."

Murdock glanced at him. "Yes, sir." His tone was crisp.

Lance leaned forward on his saddle and said, "Now, Joe. Where?"

Harmony again pointed. They were near enough to the range to make out the serrated outlines of ravines and the giant boulders strewn down the craggy side, but it took an eye like Harmony's to detect the Pass from this distance.

From here it looked like a carelessly dropped black thread hanging from the tallest point of the Flintheads.

Straining his eyes Lance endeavored to spot any sign of the remnants of Invincible, which had stood on the right peak of the Pass, but this was impossible. He closed his eyes, and said, "We should make it before sundown. Keep your eyes open for a spot of shade to eat under, Joe."

Half an hour later he received the signal from Harmony and brought the command to a halt beside a formation of boulders fringed by cottonwoods and scraggly thickets of brush.

The men loosened the girths of their mounts, received their horses' measured water rations from Corporal Gilchrist who went about the business humming snatches of unrecognizable tunes to himself in a buoyant manner which Lance thought not at all in keeping with the energy-sapping heat of the sun—unless the man was drunk.

The rations of hard tack, cheese and herring did little toward slaking the men's palates but Lance would not grant Murdock's request to issue half again the eight-ounce water ration per man.

There was a strange snap in Murdock's pleasant-voiced "Yes, sir!"

Lance was conscious that he was not entirely carrying out his duty by keeping his senior-sergeant in ignorance as to his reason for restricting the water. But he salved his conscience by deciding it was never an O.C.'s duty to instill fear needlessly into his command. He had in mind the empty *charcos* the detail had passed on the way. Those dry water holes clearly depicted the length of time that had passed since this country had last tasted rain. Both the *acequia* and the cistern at Invincible might be dry.

Lance moved to where Trooper Rutledge was watering both Lance's and Lieutenant Winters' horses, unfastened the flap of his saddle pack and withdrew his signal-service binocular and took it from its case.

Pausing to glance down at Winters, who lay asleep in the shade, Lance was startled at the thin huskiness of the irregular breathing, the hollowness and pallor of the cheeks.

Lance felt a twinge of the conscience which so often conflicted with his deep sense of duty. If it were not for that rigid, deplorable obligation to discipline, he thought, he would never have considered bringing along a man in Winters' condition.

He moved Winters' horse so that the animal blocked a cone of sunlight creeping toward the sleeping man's cheek; and then, taking Winters' blanket roll from behind the saddle, stooped and carefully inserted it beneath the limp head.

Straightening, he felt a rush of hot blood to his face. Trooper Rutledge was standing at Winters' feet.

"HE—THE LIEUTENANT looked uncomfortable," Lance mumbled miserably. Trooper Rutledge's eyes were inscrutable as he raised his hand to his visor. Under his crescent mustache his lips were invisible and Lance did not know if they were moving in derision or accord as he said, "With your permission, sir," and knelt beside Winters, removing the yellow bandanna from his neck, opening it and placing it lightly across the lower portion of Winters' face so that it protected the nostrils and mouth from the mica-shot air.

Lance walked mutely past Joe Harmony, noticing Trooper Onstot, sprawled apart from the others, obviously out of reach of Sergeant Murdock's tongue, his eyes closed, his hand limply fanning his face with his forage cap. By capturing him at Oraibi and returning him, he had placed Onstot in a position which enabled Murdock's mockery to sting with the whiplash of truth.

And remembering this, the twinge of conscience lay hold of him deeply again.

Standing alone on an elevated stringer of rock he adjusted the glass and took a long survey of the Flintheads which stretched, rugged and impassible, to the right and left, as far as the eye could reach.

Eastward and westward were the foothills, dwarfed by the palisaded crest that ran between them.

He grinned wryly, knowing that Tucsos would have no alternative but to come through the one opening in that range. A peak shaped like a flat-topped sombrero rose just this side of the Pass, but not so high as the Flintheads themselves, so that the peak cut off only the bottom view of the Pass from here. It was upon Sombrero Peak that Invincible stood, but the remnants of the fort were not visible.

Ten men including himself, he thought, defending this side of the Pass against whatever numbers Tucsos had gathered. Ten dog-soldiers in blue, and the damnedest ten a man could unite even in his wildest nightmare.

He returned the binocular to his saddlepack and stood for a moment, wondering if it would be a good example if he lay down to catch a few moments' rest. He decided against it. The rank and file never suspected a commanding officer of possessing a body like theirs, requiring relief from fatigue, food and occasional sleep.

And then suddenly his real reason came to him and he was appalled. He did not dare risk losing consciousness for even a few minutes of needed sleep.

For the space of a breath he did nothing and felt nothing. Then he became aware of Corporal Gilchrist's voice, a fine robust tenor, raised in song. The words slurred as did the tone of the concertina which Gilchrist manipulated with elaborate solemnity. Gilchrist had broken regulations by bringing it along; but the corporal was guilty of a more flagrant violation: being indisputably drunk on active duty.

Lance knew he should call the men to attention, direct Murdock to investigate Gilchrist's condition, and then he himself would mete out punishment accordingly. But the captain was acutely aware of the importance the life of each individual assumed in a command the size of this one. And the penalty for drunkenness during an expedition—on or off duty—was the same for disobedience or mutiny: death.

"Sergeant Tomkins! I want that singing stopped."

"Yes, sir."

THE CAPTAIN turned away so that his concern would not be apparent. He was having a bad moment. If Gilchrist refused to obey the order—there would be nothing else to do but sniff his breath in the degrading manner of a suspicious schoolma'rm, charge him and see the sentence carried out.

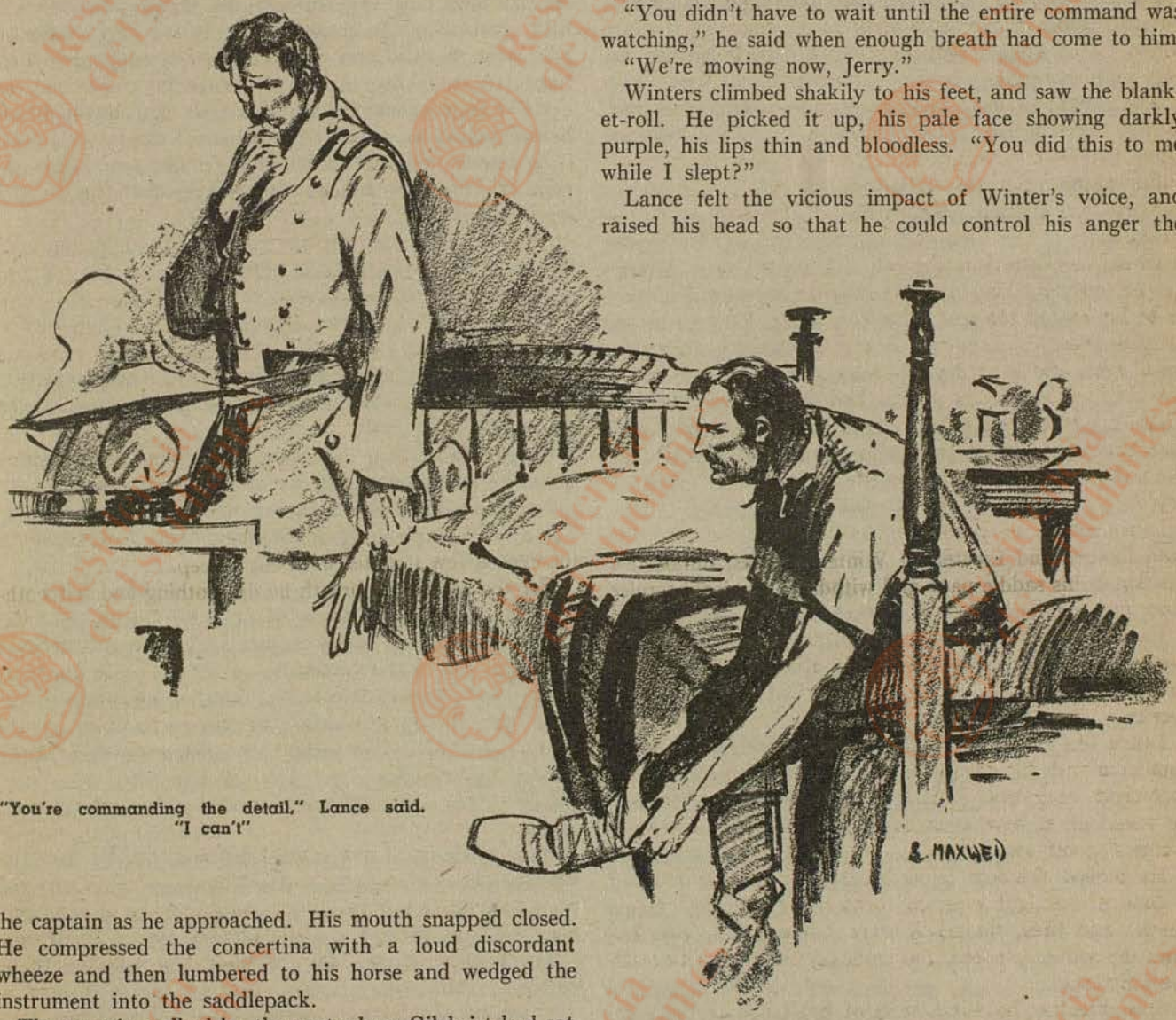
It was characteristic of Lance that he had so far done nothing about Gilchrist although since leaving Winston he had suspected him of carrying whisky instead of water in his emergency canteen. The sutler's daughter had most likely filled it from her father's store-supply the morning of the detail's departure.

Lance knew what would happen to a man abruptly de-

prived of liquor when he was accustomed to enormous quantities; and also he secretly wanted to see Gilchrist in action at his best, which was when roaring drunk. A man like that would make up for the absence of an entire squad.

But the singing, he realized, was not going to cease. "You hear me, Gilchrist?" Tomkins' voice was angry. "Captain's orders. Choke it off!" Lance turned slowly and began to walk toward Gilchrist.

Gilchrist dropped his eyes from the sky and looked at the captain as he approached. His mouth snapped closed. He compressed the concertina with a loud discordant wheeze and then lumbered to his horse and wedged the instrument into the saddlepack.



"You're commanding the detail," Lance said. "I can't"

The captain walked by the spot where Gilchrist had sat as though oblivious of the entire incident. Stopping before Rutledge, who came to his feet and saluted between the two pack mules, he nodded at the beasts' loads and said, "You've been careful with those packs?"

"I've followed your instructions, sir."

"Good. Do you know what they contain?"

"Ammunition, sir. Spare carbines, I believe. And extra food rations."

"Partly. But the rest is more important than food or even reserve ammunition."

Rutledge touched his cap, allowing no curiosity to enter his eyes.

Lance called Murdock. "Have the men prepare to resume the march, Sergeant."

Murdock's bawl pulled the men to their feet but there was no trace of the cavalryman's grumbling against the heat, at the futility of routine campaigns; and noticing this absence, the captain felt small tight lines of apprehension drawing in his stomach.

He bent over Winters, taking him by the shoulder. "Jerry. We're moving."

Winters came awake with the testy fitfulness of the very sick and sat up abruptly. He started in on a paroxysm of coughing that shook his shoulders and had him gasping for breath. His eyes, brimming and huge, fixed upon Lance their glistening hatred and humiliation.

"You didn't have to wait until the entire command was watching," he said when enough breath had come to him.

"We're moving now, Jerry."

Winters climbed shakily to his feet, and saw the blanket-roll. He picked it up, his pale face showing darkly purple, his lips thin and bloodless. "You did this to me while I slept?"

Lance felt the vicious impact of Winter's voice, and raised his head so that he could control his anger the better. "That will be all, Jerry. Take your place."

Winters altered neither his stance nor his stone. "Don't ride your rank. You and your duty and your blameless attitudes. You're never at fault as far as regulations go. But there's no regulation that calls for you to coddle an officer when he's asleep—trying to make him appear inadequate and unfit in front of the file."

Lance made his voice casually level.

"Mr. Winters, take your place."

"I'll take my place, and I'll keep it—until. . ." His voice became so low as to be hardly audible. "I won't let you kill me. You understand? I'll be alive when this is over. If I see you've deliberately led us into a trap and mean that only you shall come out of it . . . I'll find a

way out somehow. You won't go back to Cathy with the way clear for you. I'll live, you hear! Somehow I'll live and I'll follow you if I have to crawl back."

Lance stood rigid, knowing that his right fist was going to leap from his side and smash into the twisted mouth opposite his. Knowing that even the iron discipline deep-rooted in his mind and heart would not prevent his committing this mad act.

AND THEN quite suddenly he was able to say, "What is it, Rutledge?" imperturably, and found himself extremely grateful to the trooper whose appearance had stayed his hand.

Rutledge saluted. "Begging the captain's pardon, sir, I've come for my bandanna."

Winters turned slowly to stare at him. "This is yours?"

"Yes, sir." Rutledge fixed his eyes upon some distant point.

"Why did you leave it with me? Did you take my blanket-roll from my saddle?"

"In passing, sir, I noticed you were asleep. I took the liberty of covering your mouth and nose, sir. Your blanket-roll had already been placed beneath your head."

Winters held out the handkerchief, his annoyance and embarrassment clear as he said, "Thank you, Rutledge; hereafter I will attend to my own precautions."

Taking the bandanna Rutledge turned a suddenly tender face toward the lieutenant. His voice was tinged with affection. "I'd feel greatly relieved if I could rely on that, boy."

Winters' head snapped up, his cheek scarlet. "How dare you—"

Lance said quietly, "Take your place, Rutledge."

Winters watched Rutledge and turned to Lance, the ever-present humiliation that was written upon him accentuated now because he knew of the thing that had taken place between the three of them years before, a thing that could never be mentioned and never forgotten and never effaced.

Lance, unwilling to take advantage of the confusion that this moment brought to his subaltern, said quietly, "All right, Jerry," and turned immediately to call Trumpeter Saxton, who came on the run.

"We are not dispensing with formalities on this detail, Saxton. I'll have the calls sounded."

Saxton loped back to his horse and mounted, placing his trumpet to his lips, breathing tentatively into it, and then giving forth *Prepare to Mount.*

Each trooper grasped the reins with his left hand and lifted his foot to the stirrup. The single note of *Mount!* brought them swinging upward.

Joe Harmony rode toward his position in front of the column, lifting his face to glance once at guidon-bearer Haik Kebussyan as he cantered by, spitting silently from the side of his mouth as he did so.

LANCE RAISED his arm and his eye ran over the mounted men before him. Here, in miniature, was supposedly the symbol of safety and civilization on the Frontier—the Fifth Cavalry. The cavalry arm; the most courageous, the most reliable and effective; the most hell-for-leather arm of the Service.

He looked at Sergeant Murdock, at Corporal Gilchrist, who was drunk when there wasn't a drop of liquor to be had within fifty miles; at the sullen Onstot and the wild-eyed Kebussyan; at the inscrutable Rutledge and at taciturn young, Saxton; at Jerry Winters, who somehow managed to convey his pale, speechless hatred in the very manner in which he sat his horse.

The cavalry arm: the most courageous and dependable arm.

Suddenly he brought down his hand, feeling his emotion well from his body into his throat.

It was not the enemy they rode to meet that was casting this mould of his finish here on the Frontier, nor was it these members of the Fifth Cavalry. He had done it himself, long ago and through the years—since he had first instilled into his heart the Army way, its passionate adherence to duty and discipline and loyalty; and leading this tiny, inadequate detail toward Invincible was but a way of consummating the miserable end toward which he seemed to have been irretrievably falling for so long.

Instinctively he lifted his chin; it did not do for the men of a combat column to observe their officer with head bowed. . . .

CHAPTER X

FORT PERILOUS

FORT INVINCIBLE had been a rectangle formed by officers' row, the barracks, the supply houses and the corral.

Lance, inspecting its remnants, felt the emotional qualms that come to all service men upon viewing the ground on which some former battle has been fought.

As he stood alone, he recalled the first time he had set foot here.

Within two days after his arrival at Winston he had been dispatched with his first detail to ride to the relief of Invincible. He remembered the eagerness that had been his and Bill Holloway's as they forced the command at a pace the memory of which made him shudder now. But they had known that Tucsos had trapped the entire garrison at Invincible by cutting off their water supply and waiting—and men of the Fifth who were about to die might live because of a young officer's rash haste.

The recollection of his entry into the fort at the head of that exhausted command was still strong upon him and he passed his hand across his eyes, seeking to obliterate the starkness of that scene, and knowing he could not.

He walked slowly from behind the two-feet high, blackened 'dobe bases which were all that remained of this side of the commissary building, out into the compound where the command had bivouacked.

Junior-sergeant Tomkins came up to report. "From what I've seen, sir, I'd say the best spot for the men to put up is exactly where they was originally intended to put up: the barracks—what's left of them.

"There's enough odd pieces of unburned logs and boards lying about to fashion some sort of leanto against the north walls of the barracks, sir. That'll push away some of the sun, and"—a twinkle of humor came into his eyes—"it'll hold out any rains that come our way, sir."

The captain nodded. His thoughts lingered in a two-year-old past and he had no mood for humor. But he made his lips smile and said, "Very well, Sergeant. It is a danger I had overlooked. And my quarters?"

Tomkins grinned and said, "The most suitable place for the captain, I found, was in the remains of the court-martial set, sir. Because the guardhouse formed a part of the set its walls were stronger built and there is more left of them. I suggest the guardhouse, sir."

Lance saw the sparkle of the man's limited sense of humor. "Very well, Sergeant. Detail one of the men to move my things into the guardhouse. I also want the animals' waterbags placed there with each man's emergency canteen."

"Yes, sir."

"And, Sergeant. I want both supply packs placed with the waterbags and canteens. The smaller I want handled with extreme care."

CURIOUS and impressed, Tomkins went off at the double, pausing to speak a moment with Sergeant Murdock before hurrying to collect the waterbags, canteens and his captain's kit.

He heard Murdock's enormous voice bawling at the men and in a minute they were moving off to go about constructing themselves a makeshift shelter on the site of the old barracks. Then Murdock's voice reached down the compound to the corral where Trooper Onstot walked herd guard in the sweltering heat. Murdock was inviting the Alabamian to carry the supply packs to the captain's quarters. "It won't take but a mite of a moment an' a spit of strength, Rebel. You can get back to the herd soón as you tote the packs."

Onstot made no attempt at haste, and came walking, his glance fixed upon Murdock, and Lance saw the sergeant start toward him purposefully and then turn, his attention diverted, and raise his voice in a shout. "Come back here, you!"

Trooper Haik Kebussyan had been doing his best to slouch inconspicuously toward the animals in the corral. He turned and looked at Murdock.

"Get after the rest, you Arab!" Murdock yelled. "Keep away from them animals!" Kebussyan turned away with elaborate unconcern and followed the others.

A voice, coming from in front of what had been the bachelor officers' mess, rose in a roar every bit as strident as Murdock's.

"Leave that be! What you trying to do, fix me without a spot of water in this furnace? You touch that canteen and by the Lord, I'll—"

Corporal Gilchrist's magnificent body lurched toward Junior-sergeant Tomkins, who backed away, his fists closing on the straps of nearly a dozen canteens.

"Settle down, Gilchrist; I got my orders. Don't you try nothing on me." He took a nimble step away from the extended hands, snatching the canteens out of reach.

Gilchrist roared and walked forward. But Lieutenant Winters came out of the ruins of the messroom and strode up to Gilchrist.

"Are you questioning the sergeant's orders, Corporal?"

Gilchrist stared, his crisp blue eyes bright.

All that Winters was lay in his black and lusterless eyes, in the lifeless and nerveless pallor of his face, in the distorted, defeated bitterness of his face. And Gilchrist saw this without recognizing it—a man devoid of strength facing a man whose strength was his weakness—and was puzzled and uncertain because of it.

"You are entitled to no more water than you are rationed, Corporal. Is that understood?"

Gilchrist's mouth shifted and he raised his head and drew his heels together. His eyes, never entirely ugly because of their blueness and their light of vague self-derision, became as ugly as they could.

"Yes, sir." Gilchrist wheeled and lumbered off.

Lance walked over, saying, "He's not easily handled. You did it very capably."

"Did you suspect I couldn't?"

"But don't stress it. His kind explodes if constantly ridden. In this situation we need his kind."

Winters regarded him, his eyes suddenly bright as though with fever. "Why you numbered him in this detail is a mystery to me. He's a malcontent and I am almost prepared to swear I detected liquor on his breath. . . . But then, with the possible exception of Sergeant Tomkins, there is no reason for your selection of any of the men—myself included."

LANCE only said, "I want you to take Murdock and inspect the remnants of the stockade. It is important that the south wall, facing the Pass, be in good shape. The two redouts at either corner of the wall are important also and you will inspect them and report their condition to me. There is still sunlight and time enough to make your inspection."

"Very good." Winters looked at him, apparently wanting to ask a question.

"What is it, Lieutenant?"

"What about the water?"

"Joe Harmony is examining the cistern now. From the surface it looked dilapidated. I think the charcoal filter caved into the basin some time ago. In that case earth will have crumbled into the basin and absorbed whatever water has been recently caught. I doubt if Harmony's report will be encouringing."

"And the *acequia* below?"

It was not a pleasant situation. As the column had ascended the foothills leading up to the Peak it had halted upon a small plateau. Lance and Joe Harmony had investigated the miniature *acequia*—a canal dug by the engineers—which had originally led from a damned spring to a bank in which a stout timber framework had been built. A wooden waterwheel had hung on this, turned by the flow of water and the wheel had worked a force-pump which drove a small supply of water through wooden pipes to the fort.

Pipes, wheel and pump had been destroyed by Tucsos, but would have availed them nothing in any case, for the spring had dried up for good weeks previously.

"I have taken charge of the water reserve," he said. "Should you need any, come to my set in the guardhouse."

Winters' eyes were suddenly hot and hard. "I won't be made an exception. I want no favors from you."

AFTER WINTERS had moved angrily away, Sergeant Tomkins came up and reported the packs safely transferred and Lance instructed him to have Trumpeter Saxton sound first call for mess. Tucsos would not yet be near enough to hear the calls.

Grinning wryly to himself he reflected that it would make little difference one way or another if Tucsos was or was not warned by the trumpet. The Indian had probably known Lance was bringing this detail here before Lance himself was aware of it. That was the way of Tucsos.

In the center of the compound Trooper Rutledge, self-appointed cook, was fashioning the beginnings of a fire. Joe Harmony's long figure ambled toward the captain, his leathery face imparting nothing.

"Cistern's drier'n a skull on the desert."

Lance returned his steady glance. They both knew what that meant.

"I'm not surprised." Lance said; and then added, "It makes it a little worse."

Harmony started to spit and thought better of it. "A little worse, Dick."

There was a laconic kindness in his words as though he had remembered that once Dick Lance had been an all-right feller and maybe not all the things that had happened to him and because of him were his fault.

"You want the sojers to know?"

"I'll tell him myself later."

"Anything you want o' me?"

"I'd like you to try the Pass and see what there's to see on the other side."

"Signs? There won't be none. Not yet. Maybe sometime tomorrow. Afternoon. Night. An' maybe not till dawn the next day." He began to walk away and then came back.

"On the other hand he might show up an hour from now. When you start calculatin' that feller to do somethin' at the time you calculate—then's the time to figure him for just the opposite."

"I'll be obliged for your reports, Joe. We'll be ready for him."

The scout regarded him from under drooping lids, his face neither soft nor hard. "If you say so, Dick," he said, and ambled off toward the corral.

CHAPTER XI

A PLACE TO DIE IN

LANCE WAITED a minute, then followed him down the faint traces of what had been the company street. As he walked, he glanced to either side and his breath tightened. He thought of that day when he had first seen this fort—wallowing in a madness of agony, shrieking and dissolving beneath a cruelty that had been unknown to him.

Here, where a small sunken square outlined what had been the foundation of the commanding officer's piazza, a young subaltern had lain, his stomach open and gaping, his soft whispering pain coming from his mouth like a disembodied voice.

Here, where the quartermaster's office once stood, a seasoned first-sergeant sat alternately gibbering and screaming—gunpowder having been expertly inserted beneath his skin at various sections of his anatomy and expertly exploded.

In front of the stable, isolated and entire, had lain a cavalryman's leg. He remembered how foolishly he had acted, instinctively searching for the owner of the leg, as though it was inconceivable that they could be separated.

And everywhere, behind the stockade at all points, strewn crazily about the compound, lying in and out of the burning buildings, had been the blue patches of men swollen until they seemed bursting from their uniforms; bloated, as though drowned, their arms sticking straight up, their legs raised and solidified—because that was what the arrows did to you when their flints were poisoned.

He had come on it like that, the flames leaping high into the already scorched air of the desert, the men who were not mercifully dead screaming and babbling with laughter unrecognizable.

He had been a youth then, a young man imbued with the honor of service and battle, idealistic with courage fresh and untried.

Because of the headlong haste of Lance's column, he had achieved the impossible: Tucsos had been captured.

IT WAS characteristic of Tucsos that he had remained until the very last of his warriors could be shepherded safely away.

Here, in the center of this compound, Tucsos had been surprised by Lance and Holloway and Joe Harmony and the foremost cavalrymen.

He could not remember clearly what Tucsos looked like, except that he was tall for an Apache and was in full war-dress with paint masking his features. Solemn and inscrutable, patient and tolerantly aloof.

Bill Holloway had said, "Are you all right, Dick?" And Joe Harmony had looked at him, surprise lifting his eyebrows and he had said softly, "Some take this sort of thing and some don't, Dick. It's nothin' to be ashamed of if you're a don't. Only, the best thing for everybody is for you to say it or put it away from you."

But Lance had thought: *This will pass and I will put it away from me. The essential thing is to carry on, to see the mission of this patrol fulfilled; and that mission is the return of Tucsos to Winston now that he has been taken.*

But it did not pass. It was with him day and night, fresh in his mind when it should have begun to dim.

A soldier, he thought, *is trained in everything but death. That he must train himself to. A man who feels as I feel is not a soldier and has no business thinking of himself as one.*

But he was unable to reject impetuously what had always been the purpose of his life. Tendering his resignation because of a weakness developed during his first contact with death in the Apache manner—such an act could not compensate the government which had spent nearly four thousand dollars making him into an officer. So he decided to withhold his resignation until a second test should prove him unfit.

And then it came.

HEADQUARTERS in Washington wanted the captive. Tucsos was to be escorted by a detachment of cavalry as far east as the boundary of the States and from there by buckboard to the nearest railway.

It was the night before the detachment's departure that Lance first became aware of the desert's mysterious telegraph.

There was nothing tangible about it; no beating of drums, no pinpoints of fire stringing across the country, no incoming reports that any movement in the desert had been seen or heard.

But it was there, imperceptibly there.

Joe Harmony warned Lance that an attempt to rescue Tucsos would inevitably be made when the detachment got sufficiently far from the post. And he did not vouch that the command get through without a nasty fracas. Would Dick, feeling the way Joe knew he felt, be able to command this escort?

Lance, closing his mind to the challenge of fear that rose within him, looked forward to leading the escort, bringing the detachment and its prize through, and at the same time emerging the victor in this private test he had prescribed for himself.

He would command the escort.

At dawn when the detail was forming he entered Bill Holloway's quarters, shaking him awake.

"You're taking over the escort, Bill."

Holloway, when he had come fully awake, looked at him. He continued to look at him as he dressed; but now the look was accompanied by a grin.

"You got that qualmy feeling, Dick, in your belly?"

"Yes, I've got it in my belly."

Holloway buckled on his revolver and saber belt. "You were always a fine soldier, Dick. I believe you'll continue to be one. You keep the qualmies where they are and nobody'll know, Dick."

That caught him as a flint under his breastbone and he walked very erectly out into the pallid dawn and watched the remote surprise cross the faces of the troopers as they saw Holloway mount in his place. Of the command only Joe Harmony allowed his feelings to show, and he quickly covered by jerking his head away. Tucsos never removed his gaze from some distant spot in the southwest.

A bugle sounded, muted and abrupt.

Holloway dropped him a grin and flipped his right gauntlet to his hatbrim. "Don't worry about us. Child's play."

Joe Harmony wheeled his animal and there was contempt in this maneuver, contempt and a lofty dislike for men who were weak with the weakness of man.

ONLY THE scout and two troopers succeeded in making their way back. Harmony reported that the detachment had been wiped out as it entered a coulee, eight hours after leaving Winston. Harmony had been obliged to fight his way out of the thickest of it and he had an arrow wound in his back, a bullet crease along his thigh and several severe cuts across his forehead and cheek signified to show for it.

Holloway had been captured right off. And Harmony remembered hearing Tucsos' voice, raised in shouting Apache, swearing that the next time Bill saw Winston would be when he was dispatched to announce Tucsos' decision to exterminate every dog-soldier and settler in the country.

Lance requested permission to form a relief detail and go immediately in search of Holloway.

Joe Harmony turned to stare at him and spat obliquely, and when Colonel Drumm denied the permission on the grounds that it would further deplete the garrison's already inadequate force, Harmony said succinctly, "You allus manage to get saved a mite officially, don't you, Cap'n?" and walked his gangling body out of headquarters.

Thereafter Lance had many times commanded scout details and skirmishing patrols that brought him into combat with the ever-marauding bands of Apaches up from the south, and nearly as frequently with Sioux or Commanches who made their raids from the north.

Upon none of these occasions had the head of revulsion failed to raise itself within him, a kind of terror so violent that it came to be a live thing laying its hold upon him and forcing him to struggle as strenuously with himself as he did with the enemies whose very nearness brought on the memory of the first deaths he had beheld—and of the manner of death he had conferred upon his friend Bill Holloway.

But so far the feelings inside himself had not proved detrimental to his troop. A's record showed less casualties than any troop in the regiment, and by the same corollary, a greater number of victories.

And always, upon routine patrols, during rigorous campaigns, at the height of bitterly fought engagements, he sought some sign of the fate of Bill Holloway.

Now as he walked through the dead company street and compound of Invincible he knew the search for Bill had come to an end. For Bill was dead now, and Lance had come to a place of death. . . .

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NEXT ISSUE

How Japan Debauches Chinese Girls

By Earl H. Leaf

The warlords of Nippon have a secret weapon far more terrible than any bomb. It is opium—the drug that steals a man's soul; the dread, silent enemy that China has fought for so long. With this sinister weapon the Japanese are systematically destroying the courage and decency of the people they conquer. Here is the shocking truth

THE Japanese Army, unable after four years to conquer free China or pacify the areas already penetrated by the invading troops, is intensifying its efforts to break the will of the Chinese people. To accomplish this the Nipponese are using a method as efficient as it is dreadful: They are deliberately spreading the drug habit throughout China.

In this way the Japanese major-generals hope to destroy the souls of the people and to enrich themselves with fat profits from the traffic. Hordes of opium and narcotic peddlers follow in the wake of the Japanese columns to introduce and maintain this commerce. Farmers are compelled by official Japanese Army order to grow opium and sell it to the syndicates at a fixed price. Death is the penalty for failure to plant the deadly poppy. Every possible encouragement is given the Chinese—officials, students, peasants, or shopkeepers—to indulge in the use of drugs.

Attractive advertisements appear in the newspapers; entire sections of the cities and villages are given over to opium dens and drug *hongs*. Depraved girls, themselves addicts, are permitted to roam the streets preying upon prospective customers, luring them into the houses of ill fame where the opium lamp burns and the heroin cigarette lies within easy reach—all for a few coppers.

Before the Sino-Japanese hostilities commenced in July, 1937, the Chinese Government had been waging a winning battle against the scourge of opium. Drug-cure centers, hospitals and dispensaries were maintained in every community, and hospital treatment was free to anyone who could not afford to pay. There had been an intensive program of mass education, the results of which were, so encouraging that the government could relax its vigilance. Opium, the ancient enemy, was almost beaten.

But all the gains achieved during the long years of reform were lost overnight in the sections where the Japanese gained a foothold by military conquest. In the wake of advancing Japanese troops came another small army of narcotic peddlers, gangsters, prostitutes, procurers, and vice organizers.

Often they arrived in Japanese military trucks, river boats and other military conveyances. They set up business with speed and efficiency, organizing the traffic on a permanent basis, employing criminals as local managers of the syndicates before moving to the next town in the line of penetration. Behind them was left an appalling trail of mentally demoralized and physically exhausted humanity.

Where Japanese bombs and bullets failed to destroy lives, Japanese narcotics destroyed souls. Between one third and one fourth of the population of the occupied areas has been debauched by drugs through the efforts of the Japanese army and its Chinese puppets, according to a survey by Dr. M. S. Bates of the University of Nanking, recognized as the leading foreign authority on the subject.

LET US take the typical case of a certain young middle-class Chinese girl, named Hsiang-li—Fragrant Plum Blossom—who was well known to the missionary teachers of the American Methodist Mission in her little village of Paoyi, in the province of Hopei. Hsiang-li had attended classes at the mission school and was considered a bright pupil—industrious, eager, and intelligent.

Hsiang-li was employed in a small silk filature and was betrothed to the basket-weaver's son in a neighboring village. She looked forward to their wedding in the spring.

For years she had heard vague, disturbing stories of Japanese threats against her native land and finally, in the summer of 1937, the news spread like wildfire that China and Japan were at war. She hated the Japanese but she had never seen one. Then, before she or even the village elders knew what was happening, the Japanese entered the village and the local militia were all killed.

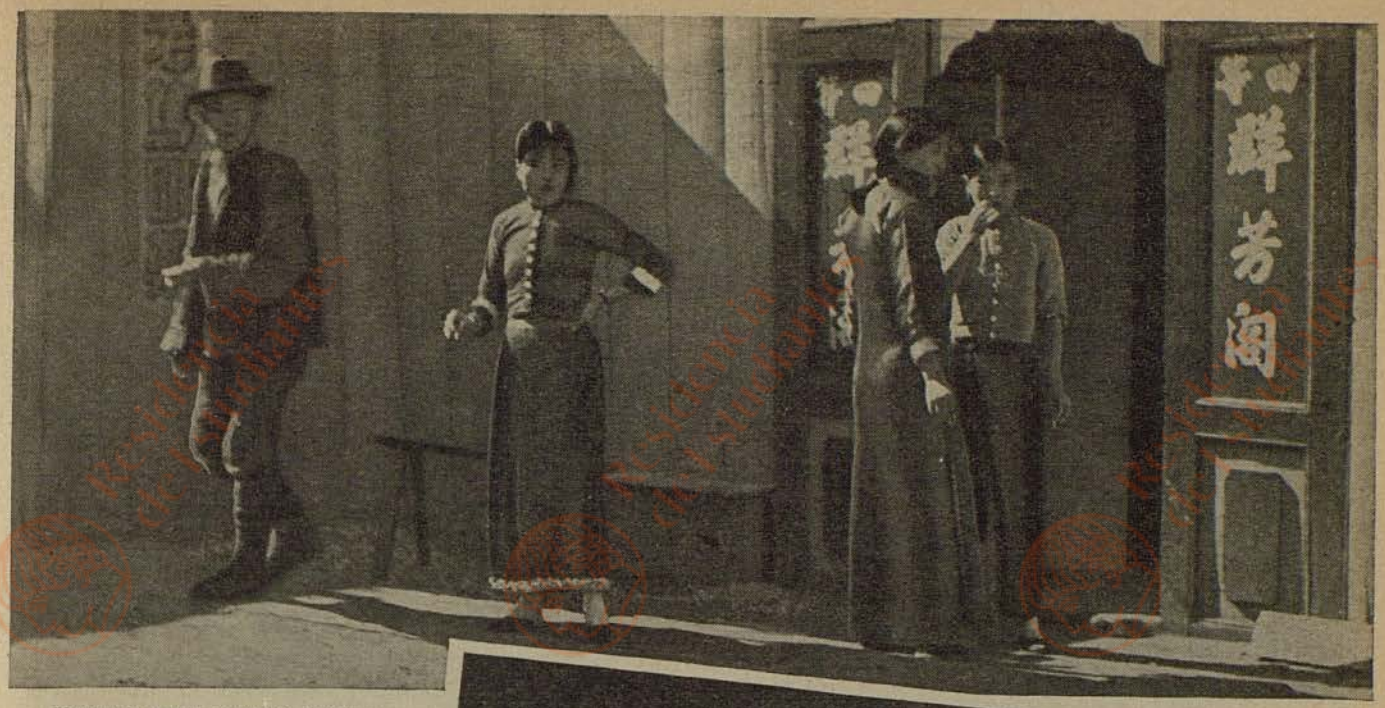
In terror her family boarded up their little baked-mud home and prayed to the great Foreign God for their lives. But in a few hours three Japanese soldiers came to the house and marched the small family at bayonet's point to the magistrate's *yamen* where all the remaining villagers had been rounded up. Many of the young men were herded together and shot. Old people were beaten and scattered. Young girls were herded into one part of the compound where they were left, shuddering with terror, until evening. Hsiang-li was among them.

She heard the Japanese drinking and carousing in a nearby room, and she spent that long afternoon in an agony of fear. Finally, when she was exhausted by her terror and sorrow, a half dozen Japanese officers entered and looked over the huddled women, snickering among themselves. Each selected a girl and armed guards dragged the girls into the officers' quarters. The remainder of the girls, the less attractive ones, were left in the room for the pleasure of the non-coms and privates.

Hsiang-li was among those selected by the officers. A few girls broke free and threw themselves into a nearby well; but Hsiang-li, held in a brutal grip by a Japanese gendarme, could find no escape. She was attacked again and again that night by the drunken officers, until at last she lost consciousness.

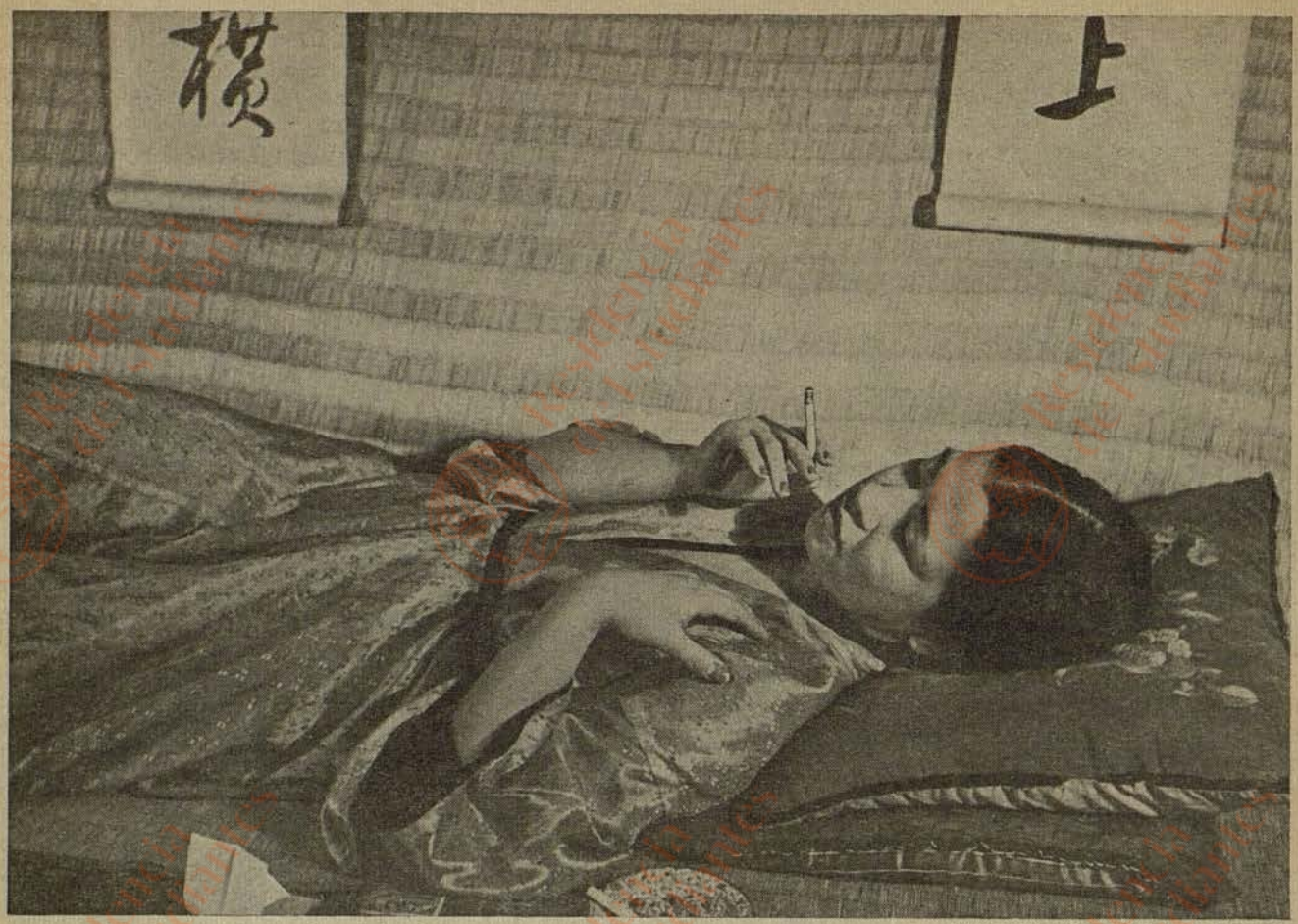
In the days following Hsiange-li lived in an evil dream. Because she never gave herself willingly to her captors, she was often beaten, and she was locked up during the daytime, when the officers were gone. But at night they returned, and her horror began anew.

The pictures appearing in this article were made through the cooperation of General Li Wen-tien, former Chief of Police in Tientsin, now leading a force of Chinese guerillas in the interior.



Photograph courtesy of Paul G. Guillumette

Above: Girl addicts use any means to lure the Chinese into opium dens. Center: A worker in a small silk filature, this girl has been caught in the opium net. Below: Japanese troops entering Pengpu. Drug merchants will follow, to enslave the inhabitants



Photograph courtesy of Paul G. Guillumette

This Korean girl arrived with the opium traffickers in the wake of the Japanese troops. An addict for five years, she is smoking a cigarette spiked with heroin

Finally, there came a day when the main body of the garrison moved on and Hsiang-li, along with the other girls, was sold to a house of ill-fame kept by a Japanese ruffian from the Nagasaki slums. Most of the visitors were Japanese soldiers who paid the proprietor of the house a few *sen* for a girl.

One of the Japanese women who seemed to have some business in the various houses tried to make friends with Hsiang-li. She advised the girl to find forgetfulness and contentment in the fragrant dreams of the poppy. Hsiang-li, her spirit crushed and her body numb with abuse, was ready to try any refuge from her torment. It was not long before she had become a confirmed addict and then the struggle to save herself was ended. She had no will to struggle now.

Weeks later Chinese guerillas under the courageous leadership of General Li Wen-tien, former Police Commissioner in Tientsin and a favorite of the American correspondents, recaptured the village. The Japanese garrison was wiped out completely and a few Japanese *ronin* escaped. As for Hsiang-li, whose story was told to a Christian aide-de-camp, she never knew the fate of her betrothed or of her parents.

THROUGHOUT the cities and villages occupied by the Japanese armed forces, narcotic dens and opium *kongs* flourish. Young Chinese and Korean girls, themselves debauched with drugs, roam the streets to lure workers, farmers, peasants and other villagers into the dives where every form of depravity and vice is practiced.

A common trick employed by these girls to get new victims into their hovels, when other methods have failed, is to snatch a hat from a man's head and run with it into the den. Once inside the door, the man is seized by a dozen girls and pushed on the matted couch. One of them gives the unwilling victim a shot from the needle and soon he feels his strength leave him and his will-power is gone. The first "injection" is free, but thereafter he is a slave to the habit—and to the Japanese who run the business.

If the man fights back against the women, he is set upon by three or four Japanese *ronin* (hoodlums), or soldiers who are always hanging about such places. He is accused of attacking the girls and is beaten to unconsciousness. To revive him, he is given an injection of narcotics. Soon he has become a slave to the vice, and one more Chinese has been robbed of his honor, his courage and his loyalty to China.

The Japanese know very well that every Chinese is a potential if not an actual guerilla. Once his soul is captured in the black sticky morass of opium he is no longer a threat to Japan's "New Order in Asia."

Korea, annexed by Japan in 1910, provides the world with a concrete example of the blessings of Japanese rule. Many Korean patriots are fighting Japan in the ranks of the Chinese armies, or with the Chinese guerillas in Manchuria and are keeping alive the flame of Korean independence, but countless Korean men and women have succumbed to the enslavement of the Japanese by economic pressure—a polite word for near-starvation—by fear of death, or by addiction to opium.

The Korean dope addicts have been the willing tools of Japanese narcotic syndicates, smuggling rings, and prostitution circuits. Koreans are employed by the Japanese *ronin* to do much of the manual labor involved in the business and their only pay is a measure of drug. Korean girls have been debauched and shipped to houses of ill-fame wherever the Japanese flag waves. They are employed not only as prostitutes but as lures for opium dens, guards and "teachers" of captured Chinese girls.

One young Korean girl traveled with the gangs of Japanese ruffians in the wake of the Japanese Army in China. She was found by Chinese guerillas when a town was recaptured from the Japanese. She had been a narcotic addict for five years and had been moving from place to place on orders from her Japanese masters for the past two years. Her case was considered hopeless although she was given into the care of an American Catholic Mission.

"Officialdom from top to bottom, including the police, is known to the public to be well represented among the drug users," Dr. Bates reported. "A respectable teacher groans, 'Ten more years of this and there will not be a good person in Nanking.' A police officer declares that twenty to thirty bodies of starved heroin addicts are reported daily by tithing-men to be left on their hands for burial. A humane Japanese official has testified to his astonishment at seeing young boys and girls in jail, already ruined by heroin."

In Nanking, which is the capital of the puppet regime, there are nearly 1,000 registered opium dens. In Peiping, there are 314 public dens and at least 600 more not registered as "public" establishments. Hankow has 32 wholesale opium stores, 340 dens and 120 hotels in the business. In districts of Canton, narcotic shops outnumber rice shops three or four to one.

Opium growing is prevalent in all the occupied areas. The poppy acreage within a radius of twenty miles of Nanking has been estimated officially at 5,000 acres. Chinese troops, recapturing one village from the Japanese, found a proclamation posted on the walls exhorting the farmers to grow more opium. A translation reads:

As it is now autumn, the season for sowing opium-poppy seed, villagers are hereby informed that they must sow the seed in good time. When the poppy is ripe it may, after payment of the statutory taxes, be sold at the current rate freely and without restrictions. It is important therefore to sow the seed immediately and not miss the season.

The Pacification Detachment of the Japanese Army at Shui Yeh.

While opium is grown and prepared in most sections under Japanese domination, heroin and opium derivatives are manufactured mostly in North China. The Japanese Concession at Tientsin has long been known as the "heroin capital of the world." Tientsin is also the source of eighty percent of the heroin that illegally enters the United States in a steady, deadly stream.

"Since the trade in heroin is not publicly organized, it cannot be statistically reported," says Dr. Bates. "An experienced dealer says that supplies come in heavy packages from Dairen and Tientsin by the Tientsin-Pukow Railway, escorted by Japanese *ronin* and fully protected by the military until they reach distribution centers in Nanking. The chief merchants here are well known, four of them under the title, 'great kings of heroin!' Their sell-

This Chinese boy was muted and made a slave to the Japanese by drugs

Photograph courtesy of Paul G. Guillumette

ing organization includes some 2,400 persons and the number of addicts is well up in the tens of thousands."

Aside from the political aspect of the traffic, the Japanese officers and their Chinese puppets are encouraging the spread of the drug habit among the populace for the sake of revenue. The Nanking regime depends upon opium taxes for its largest single source of revenue. It is estimated that $5,000,000 monthly reaches Nanking's coffers from opium taxes collected in the lower Yangtze Valley alone.

It has been said that the Japanese military officers collect a like amount for their own pockets. Waxing rich on such profits, they have lost their earlier zeal for the fighting line. It has been over a year since the Japanese Army in the Yangtze Valley has fought a successful battle against the Chinese regulars. The Japanese are even losing their heart for battle against small Chinese guerilla bands, except in the immediate outskirts of the cities where they must protect the opium crops.

In Free China, the government of Chiang Kai-shek is putting the finishing touches upon its long campaign against opium. There is every reason to believe that free China which is not under Japanese military occupation will be emancipated from the tyranny of opium in 1942.

Opium is prohibited to the general populace, doled out in carefully measured quantities to old people who would die without it. Narcotics such as heroin and cocaine are completely prohibited. Persons caught smoking opium in free China are examined by a physician, their records are investigated by police, and they are sent to Government-operated hospitals and clinics for treatment if it is their first offense. Uncurables are executed as a menace to the general health and morale of the people.

Mercy is shown to Chinese addicts in the areas recaptured from the Japanese. The measures imposed under these regulations may be summarized as follows:

1. **In the territories recovered from the enemy opium-poppy seeds and opium-poppy crops, as well as smokers' utensils, will be destroyed, opium shops and divans will be closed and the opium will be confiscated. The offenders will not be punished, since they were forced by the Japanese to break the Chinese opium laws. They will, however, be severely punished if they repeat the offense.**
2. **In the fighting zones, opium introduced from the occupied territories will be confiscated and the traffickers punished.**
3. **Opium and drug addicts in the recovered territories must be disintoxicated within two months, after which date they will be subject to punishment.**
4. **Breaches of the laws against manufactured drugs will be punished as in all other areas, even if they have been committed in the recovered territories or in the fighting areas.**

But in the regions of China held by the Japanese the situation grows steadily more terrible; and reports from French Indo-China tell the same frightful story of a people debauched by narcotics. Wherever Nippon carries her conquest, the Orient falls under the dread power of opium.

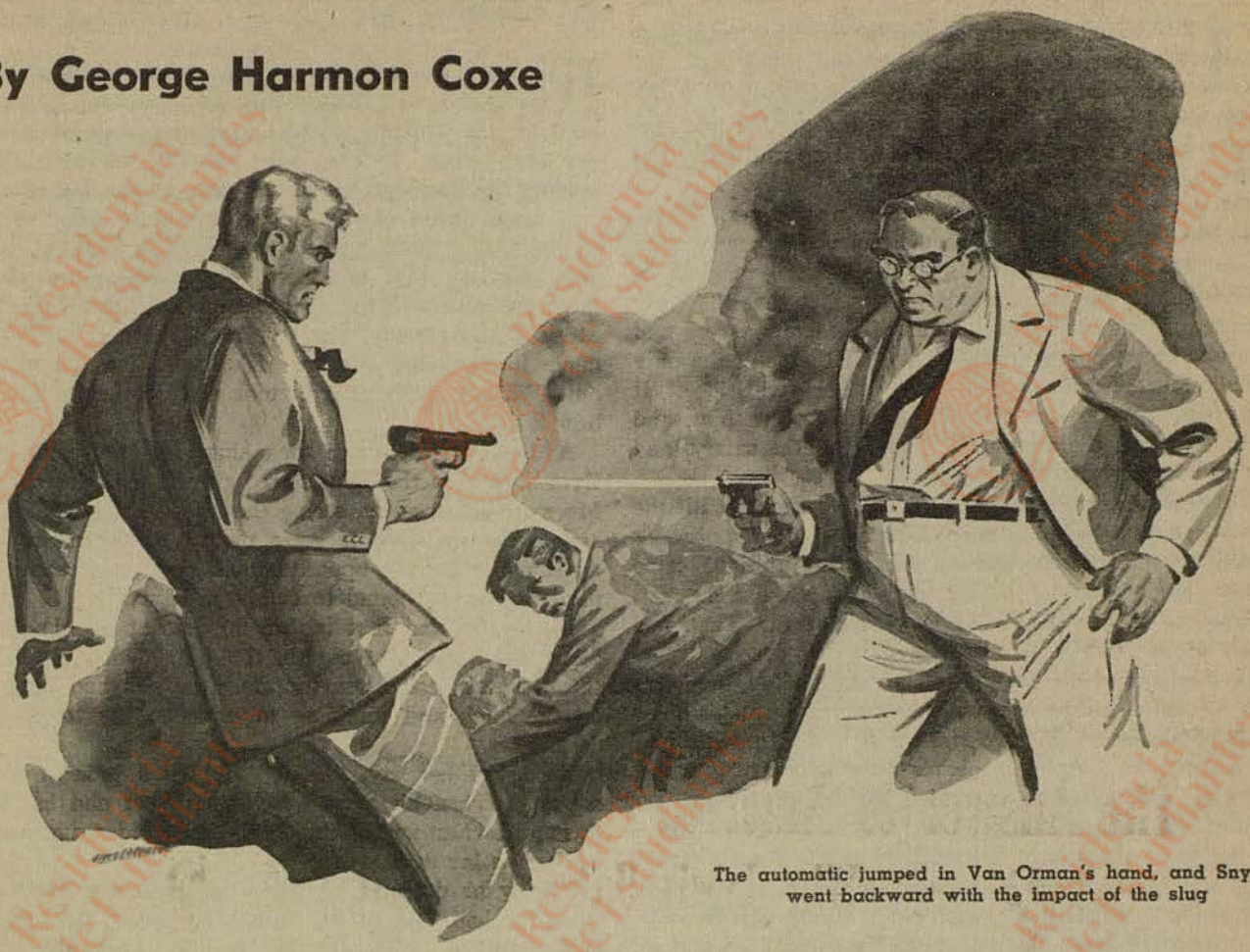
The Answer to America's Greatest Defense Problem

? Why Lewis Hates Roosevelt ?

In the Next Issue of Argosy

Assignment in Guiana

By George Harmon Coxe



The automatic jumped in Van Orman's hand, and Snyder went backward with the impact of the slug

ARRIVING in Georgetown, British Guiana, LANE MORGAN steps into the center of a murder mystery. His uncle, JOHNNY HAMMOND, was shot to death a week ago; and before either Morgan or the Georgetown police can get anywhere with the case, there is a second murder. The victim might have helped solve the mystery of Johnny Hammond's death; he is a private detective named OSBORNE, whom Hammond had hired for some unexplained reason.

According to the will, the chief inheritors of the very considerable Hammond estate will be Morgan; lovely VALERY WARD, who was Hammond's secretary and protege; and KERRY SNYDER, general overseer of the Hammond interests. These last two must be considered suspects, and so must dapper, pleasant HENRI GIROUARD, the lawyer for the estate, who owns a share in the Hammond gold mine. But Girouard has a time alibi for the murder.

LANE MORGAN makes friends with a shabby little man named C. E. CASWELL, formerly one of Johnny Hammond's employees, and learns from him the gossip of the town: that big, good-looking Kerry Snyder is in love with Girouard's exotic French wife, TASHA. When Morgan later meets Tasha Girouard he sees that she is deeply troubled about something; she tells him that her father is held prisoner by the Nazis in France.

Lane Morgan himself has fallen very much in love with Valery Ward. Now she makes an amazing revelation to him: She possessed two copies of a second Hammond will, one of which has already been stolen. This will names Lane Morgan the chief beneficiary, drastically cutting the inheritance of Kerry Snyder.

Morgan determines to keep the existence of this will secret for the present, hoping that the murderer will show his hand. And he does: A CAPTAIN DOYLE is found murdered, and he had witnessed the second will along with Valery Ward. So Valery may be in danger, but Lane Morgan still does not make the will public; he makes a copy of it, forging Johnny Hammond's signature, and gives the original to C. E. Caswell for safekeeping.

AT THE time of his death Johnny Hammond was about to sell six of his fleet of freighters. There are two prospective buyers, a Dutchman named VAN ORMAN, who says the ships will be used in anti-Nazi activities, and an Englishman, LAUGHLIN. Lane Morgan has been vaguely suspicious of Van Orman, but now Laughlin says he will not force the bidding against the Dutchman, since the ships will be indirectly aiding the British. So Morgan explains to the two men about the second will which makes him sole owner of the freighters; he asks them to keep this information secret for a day more.

Then, swiftly, Lane Morgan's suspicions are justified. Kerry Snyder is the one who has sought desperately to destroy the second will; and now Snyder coolly informs Morgan that he has kidnaped Valery Ward and cannot answer for her safety unless Morgan gives up the will. This Morgan does, without telling Snyder that it is only a copy. But now the vital problem is to rescue Valery Ward.

Suddenly Lane Morgan has a hunch. The *Hammondsen*, one of the Hammond ships, is scheduled soon to sail; and Snyder might very well have taken Valery Ward on board her. But Morgan isn't certain, and so he can't call in the police; he must go at this alone. That night he sets out for where the ship is moored. . . .

This story began in the Argosy for December 13

CHAPTER XX

HERE ARE THE VANISHED

HE COULD see quite clearly by the time he reached the river, for the combined light of the stars distinctly outlined the freighter and the jetty itself, which stood perhaps five feet above the ground and was approached by a wooden ramp. He went up cautiously and looked about to orient himself.

Off to the left were a dozen or more huge casks. To the right the jetty seemed clear and he moved this way until he saw the gangplank leading to the forward welldeck of the freighter. He had counted on the fact that the early morning sailing would keep most of the crew ashore and this was borne out by the darkness of the ship, the only light coming from a cabin abaft the lower bridge. If there was anyone else about he could not see him, and so he took out the automatic, slipped off the safety, and moved cautiously to the gangplank.

He went up slowly and stepped to the deck. With the crew's quarters below it seemed logical that any prisoner would be held topside and he started aft until he came to the ladder leading to the maindeck. When he had climbed to it he stopped to look shoreward. That was when he saw the car.

It was parked on the ground at one end of the jetty and the casks at the side had obscured it from his sight at the lower level. It gave him a jolt, seeing it there and he realized now that his nerves were like strung wires.

Along the bulkhead stretching aft he could see two doors, and between them something that looked like a passageway. He tiptoed toward it, remembering the flashlight and taking it out. He dared not use it as it was, so he got out a handkerchief and put a double thickness of linen over the lens. He was at the first door now and he opened it, listening, hearing nothing but the pounding of blood inside his head. He stepped across the weatherboard and snapped on the light. The cabin was empty.

Cautiously he came back on deck and closed the door. He started aft again and then he froze. Ahead of him a noise awakened the stillness. Steps clanged upon a ladder, hurrying steps that sounded loud and urgent and were coming right at him.

He slid along and ducked into the passageway, drawing back against the bulkhead. The steps pounded briskly closer and he knew now that someone had climbed from the after welldeck and was walking forward. They came on, hard and distinct, opposite him now. A shadow slipped past the end of the passageway and then, forward, he heard the diminishing sound of the steps on another ladderway.

Morgan let his breath out and waited, not knowing whether the man would be coming back or not. It was then that he became aware of two facing doors in the passageway. He tried the nearest, stepped in, listened. Light glowed briefly from his flash and he stepped out again. He tried the other door, squeezing quickly inside and leaning back against it as he closed it, the pounding in his head loud and furious as he waited for someone to challenge him.

No one did. He began to breathe again; then he heard something else. At first he thought it was the sound of his breathing and listened; then his heart stopped and fear made a vacuum inside him. What he heard was the sound of breathing, but not his own. It was distinct now, even, heavy, an almost labored sound that came from off to the left. Someone was here. Someone was waiting for him to make a move.

HIS hand was cold on the butt of the automatic and he turned it in the direction of the sound. Somehow he made his stiffened muscles move and stooped and got one knee down, ducking low, hunched forward. Then, holding the flashlight off to one side, he snapped it on.

A tepid yellow glow flooded the area in front of him, picking out a bunk against the bulkhead, a figure, vague and indistinct that lay there. But nothing moved and there was no sound but that rhythmic, labored breathing. Morgan straightened silently, not knowing whether to move forward and run the risk of waking the man or not. Without realizing it he took a step; then he saw the head turn.

A dirty, bearded face took shape in the feeble glow. Eyes blinked at the light, stared glassily and closed again. Morgan backed away, seeing the bound arms and ankles, and turned the light to get a picture of the cabin; then he saw her on the opposite bunk, her arms above her head and wrists bound to corner uprights.

He saw in that first frightening instant her disheveled blond hair, the tight mouth, the wide defiant eyes, and then he was beside her, dropping the gun and flashlight on the bunk and fumbling to unfasten the towels that bound her.

He heard her say, "Lane," and tried to answer but couldn't. Then his arms were around her and her head was on his chest and he could feel the shudder run through her as she lay against him.

Finally he dropped his arms and took her hands and when he had cleared his throat he spoke, his voice a husky whisper. "It's all right, darling. They didn't hurt you?"

"No—but oh, I'm so glad you came."

He picked up his flashlight and gun. There was but one window and he stepped to it. The shutters were closed but he knew he dared not use more light. He went to the other bunk, seeing again the ropes upon the man's ankles and wrists and then raising his eyes to the face.

Suddenly something stirred the fibres of his memory as he stared upon the beard-stained features. He did not know this man, and yet there was something strangely familiar here that just escaped him. For another moment he probed for some answer and then the man spoke.

"Go on." The voice came thin and hoarse. "Get her out of here first."

Morgan felt for his pocketknife. He sawed at the ropes around the ankles, cut through them. Seconds later the wrists were free as well.

"Get her away," the man whispered. "Tell the police I'm here. Tell them Laughlin—"

The rest was lost, because just as that name knifed through Morgan's brain he heard the girl's sharp gasp and wheeled. Instantly a switch clicked and light exploded in the room, blinding him for a moment so that he recognized the voice almost before he identified the man who filled the doorway.

"Everything all right?"

Bulking hugely in the little cabin, Kerry Snyder kept his voice mild and unconcerned, but his grin was ominous and the gun he held was pointed right at Morgan's

stomach. He moved up and reached for the automatic.

"Let go of it," he said.

Morgan, too surprised even to realize he was holding the gun, loosened his fingers; then Snyder had stepped back and silence closed down upon the room.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WELL MANNERED SCOUNDREL

IT WAS seconds before Morgan could look at Valery Ward. Failure brought a temporary sickness and the only thing that helped was the knowledge that he had found her. It seemed obvious now that Snyder had been aware of his presence for some time.

"You saw me come aboard," he said.

Snyder's grin seemed genuine. "You're a pretty smart lad in some ways, Morgan, and I knew if you thought about this freighter you'd be out. Alone too, because you believed what I told you this afternoon." He pocketed Morgan's automatic. "I saw you turn your car lights off. That made it easy."

He turned to Valery Ward. "How do you feel, Val? Wrists all right? What about you, Laughlin?"

The man was sitting up now, trying to get the circulation started in his arms.

"Give him a hand, Morgan, will you?" Snyder asked. And, after another minute, "Help him along, if you don't mind. Let's go where it's more comfortable. Come, Val."

Snyder took them to the captain's cabin and not until then did Morgan speak to the man who hobbled along with them, though he had known for some minutes where he had seen him.

"You were on the *Pandara,*" he said. "I stood next to you on the rail and you identified the Demerara Beacon for me."

"Did I?" The man sank weakly down on the settee beneath the window. His face was gaunt now and the mustache was unkempt. He had worn rimless glasses too, Morgan remembered, but they were gone now. "I talked with someone. I recall explaining about the bar and tide but I didn't look at you."

Snyder leaned against the doorway. Valery was on the settee opposite Laughlin, and Morgan went over beside her, though his gaze was still on the other.

"And you *are* Laughlin?" he said. "You came here to bid on Johnny Hammond's ships?"

"Yes."

Morgan looked at Snyder.

The big man shrugged. "Don't look at me. I had nothing to do with that part of it."

"That was Van Orman's assignment, I suppose?"

Snyder made no answer and the bitterness welled up in Morgan. So he had been a complete fool all the way. His plan to check up on Van Orman through what he supposed to be a bonafide representative of the British Government had been nothing but a farce. Even Girouard had been taken in by the imposter and his authentic credentials. He reached down to take one of Valery Ward's hands, and pressed it.

"What happened, Laughlin?"

"You must excuse me if I don't see well," the man said. They took my glasses. Who are you?" He listened while Morgan explained and then went on. "I engaged a car outside the customs shed. It stopped at a corner a short distance away and a man popped in with a gun in his hand. There wasn't much I could do."

"Would you like to know what they did with your credentials?"

"Perhaps I could guess."

"I'll save you the trouble," Morgan said and explained what had happened in the hotel room and how he had been duped by the phony Mr. Laughlin.

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand," Laughlin said. "Where was Hammond? He called me. Why didn't he—"

"I'll tell you." Morgan said, and when he had finished he turned to Snyder. "Do you mind answering some questions?"

"Not at all."

THE reply made Morgan pause. They were getting pretty cozy, weren't they? Playing this scene like some drawing-room drama, with understatement and sarcasm. That was what made it bad. Snyder must be pretty sure of his plan to speak so freely.

"You sent that fellow to my room the morning I arrived, didn't you?" Morgan said.

"And was that a bust?" Snyder brushed a bleached eyebrow with his thumbnail.

"What did you figure to do with me?"

"Oh"—Snyder waved emptily— "just hold you a while. It's like this. When Valery cabled I didn't know about the new will—"

"Or you would have found a way to prevent the cable being sent," Morgan said. "The same way you stole the letter I wrote Johnny."

He felt the girl stiffen beside him. Snyder just looked at him; then, slowly, a wry smile came.

"How'd you guess?"

"It was either that—your intercepting it—or the letter went astray. The odds were too long for that, especially when it was to your advantage to do what you could to make Johnny turn against me."

"Kerry!" Valery Ward cried. "Oh, of all the—Oh! You knew he was dying, and after what he'd done for you—"

"It worked, didn't it?" Snyder said, but his face was red.

"Yes, it worked." Her voice was cold with disgust now. "It broke his heart but it worked. I remember how you kept continually harping on the subject until you got him to change his will. I thought it was all right then because—"

She broke off and looked at Morgan and he saw the shame and misery in her gray eyes.

"It's all right," he said.

"He changed it," Snyder said, "and I thought everything was all right. When you didn't answer Val's cable that was all right too. I spoke to Girouard and if he hadn't been so damned particular we could have sold the line before you got here."

He looked at Laughlin. "No, I guess we couldn't at that. Hammond had told Girouard he had cabled for Laughlin and Girouard felt bound to wait for his bid. He wanted to wait for you, too. A reasonable time, he said. If you didn't come he could authorize the sale, but he'd rather you showed up and signed a release. Anyway, he was only going to wait for Laughlin—and that was Van Orman's own kettle of fish. I just wanted to sell the ships, but Van Orman didn't want Laughlin to have them—so he grabbed him."

Snyder frowned. "The hitch was I didn't know about the new will at first and then I had to figure all the angles. Maybe Valery had the copy. She at least knew about it, but she hadn't said anything to Girouard, or offered it, so it looked as though she was on my side."

"Yes," the girl said. "And what a silly little fool I was. If I had gone direct to Henri Girouard none of this would have happened. But no. I had to let my emotions do my thinking. If it hadn't been for the murder of Osborne—and that frightened some sense into me—I would never have mentioned that will. I suppose Osborne was not your kettle of fish either, was he, Kerry?"

Snyder's face tightened. Morgan started to interrupt but the girl spoke first.

"I wouldn't believe you had stolen the copy of that will. Lane said you must have and I wouldn't listen. I wouldn't listen to my own mind. Of all people, you alone had the really big motive for wanting it. But I didn't want to believe that. I didn't like Lane Morgan. I liked Kerry Snyder even though I knew the things I liked were only skin deep and that beneath there could never be for me anything warm and genuine and worthwhile. But no. Valery didn't want to believe you could do anything really despicable."

The stiffness had gone from her face when she finished, leaving it pale and tired-looking. Snyder stared at her narrowly, the flush still coloring his cheekbones.

"You're the one who came to my house last night too, aren't you, Kerry?" she asked.

"I wasn't going to hurt you," Snyder said. "I only wanted about ten minutes to search that chest of yours. I didn't know Morgan had the will then." He stretched, closing one eye. "And for once I think he out-smarted himself."

"Perhaps," Morgan said.

Snyder stopped stretching. "Perhaps?"

Morgan nodded, not sure just why he felt this rising confidence but aware of it nonetheless.

"There are still some details, aren't there?"

"If there are," Snyder said, "they'll be settled just as soon as Van Orman gets here."

CHAPTER XXII

SALUTE THE DOUBLE-CROSS

CONRAD VAN ORMAN came in from the bridge with his characteristic rush and behind him, in the uniform of a ship's officer, a captain's stripes on his sleeve, was the man who had posed as Laughlin.

"What's this?" Van Orman demanded bruskly. He swept the room with his thick-lensed stare, but his attention centered on Laughlin. "What's he doing here?"

Snyder looked at Van Orman. "Not doing any harm, is he?"

"He should be below."

"Morgan cut him loose," Snyder said. "We brought him along."

"I must remind you that he is my responsibility, Snyder, not yours."

Snyder shrugged, "Let him stay till we finish."

"Then he must be tied. . . . Captain!"

The man in uniform started for the door but Snyder called through it.

"Larson!"

A stalwart, thick-jawed man of forty or so appeared and looked questioningly from Snyder to the captain who said, indicating Laughlin: "Secure his arms, mister."

Morgan glanced at the first officer; then he looked at the captain.

"Good evening, Mr. Laughlin."

Something flickered in the man's eyes. He bowed stiffly from the waist and his answer came crisp and precise.

"Captain Schwartz, if you please."

"Oh, yes," Morgan said. "You gave an excellent performance this afternoon, Captain. My congratulations."

It was difficult, keeping the bitterness from his voice now. Studying the lean, hard-bitten face, and the mannerisms so apparently Teutonic, he wondered how he could have accepted the man as English that afternoon. That he had done so, he realized, was simply because he was prepared in advance for the meeting with a British representative.

Larson came in with a length of rope and fastened the real Laughlin's wrists behind his back. When he withdrew, Van Orman said, "Ah, that is better," and sat down at the rectangular table in the center of the room. "Now . . ."

He leaned back, hands on the chair arms. Morgan eyed the ruddy, heavy-jowled face a moment and then glanced deliberately at his wristwatch.

Van Orman grunted. "You are in no hurry, Mr. Morgan?"

"As a matter of fact, I'm not," Morgan said.

"Hmm." He drummed fat fingers on the chair arms. "You complicate things."

"*Heil* Hitler," said Morgan.

Van Orman's jowls got purple and his magnified glare was momentarily vicious. Suddenly he smiled.

"It is a joke to you, I see."

"You *are* a Nazi, aren't you?" Morgan glanced at Snyder. "But I didn't figure you. I suppose you actually spell your name with a sch and an ei, don't you?"

"You're half right," Snyder said. "The ei and sch, yes. The other, no."

"You do business with Van Orman."

"I'll do business with anyone."

"You're for them."

"I'm for Snyder."

VAN ORMAN cleared his throat but before he could speak Morgan cut in, determined to waste as much time as possible in talk.

"You gave an excellent performance this afternoon, Herr Van Orman," he said carelessly. "Your collaboration was faultless. It was rehearsed, I gather."

Van Orman smiled. "To some extent. You know about the real Laughlin? I see you do. . . . The rest, of course, was simple. Schwartz had the credentials. We made ready for any contingency."

"And so," Morgan said, "Schwartz registered at the Park, called on Girouard, made his bid. He knew what to say when Girouard told him it wasn't high enough. He knew all about Conrad Van Orman and his reasons for wanting the ships and with him it was agreeable, although to make sure he would cable Washington for confirmation. Very credible. Though having the call must have given him a start. And when you saw the will, Captain—"

"I was astounded," Schwartz said.

"That at least was genuine," Morgan said. "As was

your own astonishment, Herr Van Orman. I take it Snyder did not confide in you completely."

"He did not." Van Orman turned his magnified stare on the big man. "Well, don't stand there leering! Sit down!"

The command was curt, perëmptory, and Morgan, watching Snyder, saw him look at Van Orman, squinting one eye. Right then Morgan knew that there was not the confidence and understanding between these two that he had expected. They were working together but they did not like or even trust each other.

"Now we talk," Van Orman said. "Now we can settle this matter."

Morgan was too startled to use the gun in his hand

"Before you do," Morgan said, "I wish you'd tell me about Doyle."

"Doyle," said Van Orman, "was a stupid Irishman."

"Doyle knew Conrad," Snyder said dryly. "That was the real trouble."

The story came out quickly then, and Morgan saw the importance of it. Doyle knew Van Orman to be a Nazi sympathizer and he had overheard Van Orman and Snyder talking aboard the *Hammondsen* in Para. Snyder had had been assuring Van Orman that with the right story Johnny Hammond could be persuaded to sell the shipping line and that he, Snyder, would put in a word if he could.

"That was after Johnny had made the will in your favor?" Morgan said to Snyder. "And naturally you were interested in getting the highest price. A couple of hundred thousand more, in fact, than Laughlin had offered on his earlier trip."

"Exactly," Van Orman said coldly.

"Why not?" Snyder's lips dipped. "It wasn't money out of your pocket, Conrad. The trouble was"—he looked at Morgan—"that Doyle threatened to go to Johnny. Van Orman wanted to put his own skipper aboard—we thought the deal could be put through quickly—so I put Schwartz on the payroll and fired Doyle. I knew he was broke and I made—ah—arrangements with a friend to see that he didn't get out of Para for a couple of weeks."

"But something went wrong with your—ah—friend."

"Precisely," Van Orman said.

"Although what it was and how Doyle got up here so quickly I'll never know," Snyder added.

"But Doyle *did* tell Johnny of his suspicions," Morgan said, "and Johnny cabled for Laughlin. You'd forgotten about Laughlin when you made plans in Para, huh? Van Orman was to come to Johnny with his story about the Netherland Indies, and with your good offices, the sale would be made."

"It very nearly was," Van Orman said.

"But after that it wouldn't do you any good to kidnap Laughlin with Johnny alive because he would remember the real Laughlin. When you found out the cable had been sent you still had to convince Girouard—who hadn't met the real Laughlin."

Van Orman nodded. "Girouard was important. Without his consent we would be delayed." He flipped a pudgy hand. "Fortunately, it was not difficult to convince him." He paused as Morgan looked at his wristwatch. "But I see Mr. Morgan is impatient, Snyder. Let's get on with our plans. He has checked out of the hotel and is sup-

posed to be spending the night with you and leaving tomorrow afternoon?"

"Righto."

VAN ORMAN'S magnified stare came back to Morgan. He grunted softly and leaned across the table. "If you should write us the proper sort of note, Mr Morgan, I believe everything would be quite in order." He looked at Snyder. "There would be nothing wrong in Mr. Morgan's deciding to take this trip to Puerto Loya on the *Hammondsen*, would there? If he wanted to?"

Snyder frowned, obviously puzzled. "I don't get it."

"I see you don't." Van Orman became elaborately patient. "Mr. Morgan is leaving tomorrow. But in talking with you and being in no particular hurry to get back, he decides it might be interesting to take a short trip aboard a freighter. A sudden whim of his, if you like—but not at all unreasonable.

"He realizes that Girouard is expecting him to sign a release on the estate, but being late when he makes up his mind he writes a note and asks you to deliver it to Girouard rather than telephone him and wake him up in the middle of the night. The note apologizes for the sudden departure and also becomes the release Girouard wants.

"Mr. Morgan will say that he accepts the terms of the will without reservation and that his share can be sent to his American address at the proper time." He leaned back, spreading his hands. "It's really very simple and quite in order. Girouard, I guarantee, will accept such a note as bonafide—the way I dictate it."

"Yes," Snyder said slowly. "Sure he will."

"You didn't know about this new will until today?" Morgan asked, seeing again the quick resentment touch Van Orman's glance as it found Snyder.

"No."

"Snyder was still hoping that I did not have the original, that it might not turn up in time to stop the sale." Morgan looked at Van Orman. "And you, of course, went to him after you'd left me this afternoon and demanded to know what it all meant? Yes, I thought you would. . . . And you were willing to go ahead?"

Van Orman smiled. "With certain modifications. He assured me that he would get the will from you and also take care of the remaining witness. So I agreed to go ahead with the deal."

"For a fifty percent cut in the take," Snyder said bluntly.

"I see." Morgan looked from one to the other, aware now that his first hunch—that there was bad feeling between the two—had been correct. "Four hundred and ten thousand apiece. That's very nice for you, Herr Van Orman. I don't wonder you agreed to the proposition." He smiled at Snyder. "It's not so nice for you though. Still—"

"It was that or nothing," Van Orman said.

"And the idea of the letter," Morgan went on, "is clever. If I should write it I think Girouard would accept the explanation without question and go ahead with the sale. Suppose I don't write it?"

"You will," Van Orman said.

"Will I"

"You will indeed."

"What makes you think so?"

Van Orman leaned forward again. "Your own amateurish attempt to outwit those more clever than yourself has caused this young lady a lot of trouble." He waved at Valery Ward. "You took considerable risk in coming here to free her and it occurs to me that you are very fond of her."

"I'm in love with her, if that's what you mean."

"Precisely. And that is why you will write the note. If you are stubborn other measures will be taken. You will be taken below and shackled. You will then be forced to watch things you will not like. She will be brave and try not to cry out—"

"Nuts!"

"You think so?" Van Orman smiled and shook his head. "That is because you speak of things of which you know nothing. To you I sound melodramatic. But such things are an everyday occurence with recalcitrants in my country. You also underestimate the importance of my mission. I do not intend to fail. Believe me, Mr. Morgan, I do not bluff."

Valery Ward's voice hit back at him. "Don't believe him, Lane! He wouldn't dare."

Van Orman raised his brows at her and looked at Morgan. "You will write the letter, Mr. Morgan, that I know. Even if you weren't in love with her you would write it when you see what happens."

MORGAN had already made up his mind. His palms were damp and somewhere in his chest a nerve was jumping. He believed Van Orman and gave thanks that he had taken the precaution with the real will and that, having taken it, his brain had not failed him.

Now was the time. He had only to gamble that he had sized up the two men correctly. He was sure of Van Orman. The man's very words had substantiated his opinion. Nothing would be permitted to stop his mission. With Snyder—well, Snyder was already forfeiting half the reward he expected.

He forced a smile. There was no fear in him now; he was no longer anxious or excited, instead he was calm and poised, and as he led up to the climax he had prepared his voice was steady and unworried.

"And what happens if I sign, Herr Van Orman?"

"To you and the girl? Nothing. With your letter the sale will be made. Snyder will collect. You and Laughlin and Miss Ward will take the trip we had planned for her and Laughlin. From Puerto Loya the *Hammondsen* will proceed to Mexico for a cargo of mercury and general supplies for Japan. We will find some way to put you ashore safely and yet with no danger to ourselves."

Morgan had opened his mouth to reply when Valery Ward's voice again cut in sharply.

"I don't fancy taking your word for that," she said. "I'm afraid you'll have to change your plans."

Morgan stared at her. So did Van Orman.

"Really," he said. "In what way, Miss Ward?"

"Just what do you intend doing with the third copy of the will?"

Morgan felt the tightness come over him. He could not see her eyes but he did see the paleness of her face, the rigid thrust of her chin. For a silent second or two he believed her. Even Van Orman was uncertain.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "What third copy?"

"I made two and the original. Kerry stole one copy—"

"Wait!" Van Orman fixed his stare on Snyder. "Well, fool?"

"She's lying!" Snyder said. "She must be lying."

Morgan felt his heart swell and a thickness came in his throat. She was lying all right. She would have told him had there been another copy. She was lying and she was going to stick to it. And Van Orman could not be sure and he would, for his own safety, have to break her until she told the truth.

"I'm sorry," Van Orman said quietly. "I'm afraid, Miss Ward, that you will have to tell us more about this will."

"I'll tell you," Morgan said. He took her hand, pressed it. "Nice try, darling," he said and continued before she could reply. "There is another copy—in a sense. But she didn't make it, I did."

"Oh?" Van Orman said finally. "Perhaps you'll explain."

Morgan looked at his wristwatch. "I can now," he said. "Because now there is nothing you can do about it." He looked at Snyder, seeing the suspicious glint in the blue eyes. "You have both copies?" Snyder nodded. "Have you compared them since you took the one from me?"

"No," Snyder said. "Why should I? I know Johnny's signature and I know Val's."

"Suppose you look at them again."

For a moment or two the big man sat quite still, a curious uncertainty warping his glance.

"Well," Van Orman snapped. "Do as he says."

SNYDER took an envelope from an inside pocket. Van Orman grabbed it and withdrew the contents. He inspected one copy, found it the carbon, looked at the other. He put them side by side to compare signatures and for a long time studied them, his nose practically on the paper. When he looked up and finally spoke his voice was strangely quiet.

"The signatures are identical."

"All three?"

"All three."

"Yes." Morgan waited, smiling with his lips. He let a few more seconds tick by with Van Orman watching him before he said, "Should they be?"

"Why shouldn't they?" Snyder said. "The same people signed them."

Van Orman said nothing.

"Write your name three times," Morgan said, "and see if your own signatures are identical. They won't be, I can assure you. No one writes his name exactly the same way every time. The characteristics are there, the curves, the angles and spacing, but the measurements vary, Herr Van Orman. The angles widen and narrow, the length of the letters vary, so does the spacing. . . . You don't believe me?"

He paused. "All right. If that isn't proof enough suppose you look again. Consider everything, not just the formation of the letters. See if there isn't some slight difference in the appearance of those signatures." He watched Van Orman repeat his careful scrutiny and when he looked up there was something in his eyes that the thick-lensed glasses could not hide. Morgan nodded. "You've found it, haven't you?"

"There is nothing," Van Orman said in that same quiet tone, "except the ink."

"Yes," Morgan said, "the ink."

He stepped up to the table to look at the signatures. He had noticed the difference that afternoon when he had inked in the names; now there seemed to be an even greater disparity, the signatures on the copy a shade or two darker than those on the will he had forged.

"And yet Johnny Hammond signed both the original and the copy at the same time," he said. "So did the witnesses. So how would you account for the difference, Herr Van Orman?"

Van Orman looked at him. Morgan watched, seeing that stare move finally to Snyder and freeze.

"I cannot account for it," he said.

"I have a fountain pen," Morgan said, and took it out. "Try a sample of the ink alongside the signatures on the so-called original document."

Van Orman accepted the pen automatically. He made a mark as directed and put the pen down. He blew on the ink to hurry the drying.

"Identical," he said thickly. "You made it."

"I'll tell you how," Morgan said, and did so. "It took me quite a while because I was careful. But I had no idea it would serve its purpose. I wasn't looking forward to any such situation as this, but it did seem wise to preserve the real will in case I needed it."

"Where is it?"

"By now," Morgan said, "in the hands of the police."

Snyder cursed savagely. "He's lying."

"Shut up!" Van Orman snapped.

Snyder's face got red. "Listen, you," he said. "I'm damned sick of your orders."

Van Orman said, "Oh," and he said it insultingly.

Snyder went on doggedly. "I say he's lying. He wouldn't dare go to the police after what I told him this afternoon."

"That's right," Morgan said. "I didn't go. When I thought of this freighter I had one chance left. Either Valery was on it or she wasn't. Either I'd get her off or I wouldn't.

"I gave that will—sealed in an envelope—to a bellboy with instructions to deliver it to the police in two hours if I did not reclaim it. You see the logic there, Herr Van Orman? Two hours was time enough. If I came and did not find her I would have time to get back to the bellboy—if she was not here there would be no danger to me in coming aboard—without endangering her in any way. If she was here and I got her off I could still claim the envelope and go to the police. But if she was here and I was trapped, why then— You see?"

VAN ORMAN wasn't watching him, he was watching Snyder. He did not move during the speech, but his face grew livid and his eyelids closed. Morgan stole a glance at Snyder, seeing the ridged jaw, the bright defiance in his regard of the German.

This is it. Morgan thought. *This is the time. Rub it in while they're raw and bleeding. If you can't do it now, you're whipped.*

"So," he said evenly, "it looks as though one of you is out of luck—maybe both of you. I might still make a deal with Van Orman, given a guarantee of Valery's safety, but in that case I'm afraid there'd be nothing in it for you, Snyder."

He paused, and tension settled over the room. Everyone was watching the two men. Captain Schwartz moved away from the door and stopped, his harried glance moving from Snyder to Van Orman. In the corner of the settee, Laughlin was sitting up, his mouth grim and a

glint of satisfaction in his eyes. Then Morgan felt Valery move and her hand touched his. He went on unhurriedly, addressing Van Orman.

"Of course that would depend entirely on Snyder. If he was discreet we might make a deal, but if he was vindictive and should happen to mention your mission to the authorities I'm afraid you would be in no position to buy anything and that way both of you would suffer. No money for Snyder, a detention camp for you."

Van Orman broke the spell abruptly. He sighed audibly. He looked at Morgan and shrugged. "Well, we must do the best we can," he said. "You agree, Snyder?"

"What?" The big man seemed not to understand, so intent was his concentration. "Yes, I guess so. Well—"

He reached for the wills, folded them. Van Orman pulled his handkerchief from his breast pocket. Snyder started to tuck the envelope away and as he did so a sudden muscular spasm struck him. The envelope dropped. His hand darted swiftly inside his coat. Then, just as the gun butt showed, he froze.

The swiftness of the action held Morgan fascinated. He could not understand Snyder's stony immobility or explain the half-drawn gun until he looked at Van Orman. The handkerchief was fluttering to the floor. He had seen no move, nor could he explain where the little automatic came from. But it was there, compact and ugly in the pudgy hand, the muzzle lined up with Snyder's chest.

CHAPTER XXIII

I'M FOR SNYDER

IT SEEMED forever until Van Orman spoke. There was no sound from anyone. No one moved. Then, slowly, the smile came to the thick-jowled face and Van Orman said:

"Release it, please! That is better. . . . Schwartz! His gun."

Schwartz moved up behind Snyder, reaching over his shoulder to slip the gun from under the coat. He stepped back, waiting. Snyder got up slowly from his chair, his handsome face set and shiny.

"Steady," Van Orman said. "You thought you would beat me to it? No, Snyder. It showed in your eyes. You would like to try and make a bargain with Morgan for yourself, eh?"

"All right." Snyder shrugged, his tone resigned.

"You have lost," Van Orman said. "You had your chance but it did not work out for you. There is still the original copy of the will to balk you, and now it is essential that you do not spoil my work. I am sorry it must be this way but"—he tossed his empty hand six inches and let it fall—"you give me no alternative. Watch him, Schwartz!"

He backed around the table, putting himself between Snyder and the door. Schwartz ordered Snyder to the other end of the table and took a stand a few feet to one side of Morgan.

"Now, Mr. Morgan." Van Orman's voice was brusk and incisive. "Let us see. You now inherit the Hammond Line. Tomorrow the sale will go through as scheduled. We will think up some way of explaining Snyder's absence. I have a certified check to turn over to Girouard and then, perhaps, when the money is in your hands, you might like to make me the same offer Snyder did."

Morgan saw the color drain from the big man's face, leaving the cheekbones white and taut.

"What offer?"

"The little matter of the—ah—fifty percent rebate."

"Why should I offer you anything?"

"Well"—Van Orman smiled—"I still have Miss Ward."

"Oh, yes. You still have Miss Ward."

"You would hardly expect me to trust your discretion without some safeguard. Frankly I have never had much money, Mr. Morgan. This may be my one and only chance to get some. My country is getting the ships at a price agreeable to them, and if I'm shrewd enough to make a so-much better deal—I'm sure you understand."

"Just what is the schedule?"

"Snyder will take your place aboard the *Hammondsen*. You and I will return to town. Naturally you will stay with me until the deal is completed. And if you carry out your part Miss Ward will be put ashore in due time and you will be free to collect the rest of your inheritance.

"I will be in touch with Captain Schwartz at all times, and of course if you should fail to carry out my terms I could no longer answer for Miss Ward's safety. I mean by that, if you should try to inform the authorities, we would have to make sure than when the *Hammondsen* was searched Miss Ward—and Laughlin and Snyder—would not be aboard."

Morgan saw that there was nothing further he could do except trust to the plan he had made. If his psychology was sound and his appraisal of Snyder's character correct, he might still pull it off.

"You don't give me much choice," he said, and looked at Snyder. "It's kind of hard to take, isn't it? After all your grief you wind up without a dime. Well, it was your idea. If you let Van Orman outsmart you it's your tough luck, not mine."

"I thought you'd be sensible," Van Orman said. "And now I think we'd better tie up Snyder, Captain."

"Larson!" Schwartz yelled.

THE first officer came to the doorway, his glance sweeping the room, lingering on Snyder but nothing showing in his face.

"Rope," Schwartz said. "Smartly, mister."

Morgan shifted his position and got in front of Valery Ward. Snyder, at the end of the table, did not move at all. His face was still taut, his grin fixed as he watched the gun in Van Orman's hand.

Morgan waited, hope dying. Realizing the mutual distrust in the two men, he had pounded at this weakness and split them wide apart, but he had not thought Snyder would let Van Orman catch him with a gun. When this happened he had hoped that the big man would be angered into making a move. Now, as he saw Larson appear with two lengths of rope in his hand, he knew he had lost.

"Secure his arms," Schwartz ordered.

Larson unbuttoned his jacket and held up a length of rope, and that Morgan had some warning of what was to happen next was due chiefly to his angle of vision. Luck perhaps, or the characteristic stubbornness that made him hope after all hope should have gone, kept him alert. But for that he might not have caught the glimpse of the gun butt in Larson's belt as the coat opened and he lifted his hands as though to measure the rope.

Just that one glimpse was all Morgan had, but it was

enough. Instantly his weight shifted. He measured Schwartz. He saw Snyder's hand swing, yanking the gun from Larson's belt. When Snyder shoved the mate aside, Morgan was already moving.

It was all over in five seconds, yet by some trick of vision Morgan was able to see it all, even though his whole attention seemed fastened on Schwartz. It was only later that he could put together the action-crammed sequence and reconstruct the manner in which the two separate and distinct incidents were synchronized.

AS HE saw Larson stumble aside, Morgan whirled on Schwartz, striking at the gun with his left as he moved up. He felt his fist hit the wrist and saw the gun spin crazily aside; he saw too, that Van Orman had lost but a fraction of a second in his reaction, that his hand was tight on his automatic, the trigger finger already tensing.

Morgan swung hard with his right at the bewildered Schwartz, smashing him cleanly on the jaw, seeing him sag and hitting him again with the left as he went down. And Schwartz slumped forward and Morgan could not get out of the way and tripped. Falling like that, trying to keep his balance, he saw the little automatic jump in Van Orman's hand, heard it roar, and from the corner of his eye saw Snyder's torso jerk with the impact of the slug.

The big man had his feet braced, the gun level, but the shock of the bullet spoiled this and at the same time saved his life, twisting him around just enough so that Van Orman's following shot missed him.

Morgan did not know that then. He heard the roar of it and saw Snyder drop behind the table. Then Morgan was on the floor, arched over Schwartz's form and Snyder had ducked and snapped up the gun.

Van Orman's fired once more, the bullet splintering the table, and then, as Snyder aimed upward between the legs, the German wheeled and dived through the open doorway.

Snyder fired once hurriedly. He cursed, jumped to his feet and ran toward the door. A tremor ran through the floor as heavy steps pounded down a ladderway outside. There was a shot, followed presently by two more in quick succession and sounding farther away; then someone moved behind Morgan and he glanced about. Larson had picked up the gun he had knocked from Schwartz's hand; now it angled down until Morgan was staring right in the muzzle.

"Better get up," Larson said.

Morgan put his hand on the slumped figure beneath him. He was on his knees, supporting himself with this arm, and as he moved his fingers knocked against something hard. He knew at once what it was—a gun, Schwartz's own gun, carried like Larson's in the belt.

"Okay," he said, "as soon as I get untangled."

It was not hard to do. Larson was behind, and Morgan's back shielded what his quickly searching fingers did. He got the gun out, palmed it as well as he could, and stood up, still with his back to Larson, bringing the hand up under his coat and, with what looked like a natural attempt to hitch up his trousers, slipping it in against his stomach. He turned and sat down beside Valery Ward.

She did not say anything, but her eyes were eloquent and unafraid, and he forgot all about Larson and Laughlin and would have taken her in his arms then and there had he not heard the step behind him.

Snyder was coming through the doorway. His face was dark with anger and frustration, his lips flat against his teeth. There was a red stain on his white coat below his left shoulder and he held the automatic at his side. He studied them in turn, looked finally at Larson and then the corner of his mouth twitched.

"He forgot one thing, didn't he, Larson?" he said. "He hired the skipper, but he forgot that I hired the mate. I knew you'd take a hand."

"I couldn't use the gun when I came in," Larson said. "That"—he glanced disdainfully at Schwartz's unconscious figure—"that windbag had me covered."

"You did the best thing. And you"—Snyder looked at Morgan and the twitch at the corner of his mouth steadied and became a grin—"you're doing better all the time with those fists. Schwartz might have got me, but I was too damned mad to care."

"I hoped you'd be," Morgan said.

"Yeah. You think of lots of little things."

"He got away?"

Snyder nodded and swore under his breath. "I couldn't get a line on him in the dark. . . . Well, get me some iodine, Larson and then I'll figure out what to do with our company."

"You'd better figure out what you're going to do with yourself, hadn't you?" Morgan said.

"It's the same thing," Snyder said. "Once I've figured out the right angle for you three I'll be all right. . . . Oh, Larson. Why don't you use that rope on your skipper? Then you can lug him below when you get the iodine."

KERRY SNYDER sat in the chair holding the gun in his right hand while Larson made ready to dress the wound under his shoulder.

"I'll do it if you like, Kerry," Valery Ward said.

Snyder studied her a moment, then shook his head. "Unh-unh," he said. "I'm not sure I trust you, sweet. Go ahead, Larson, and don't swab iodine all over everything either."

He sat there grinning while Larson set to work. The sweat began to leak down his face before the first officer had finished but the grin was still there and there was no flinching.

"Now get the back," he said, referring to the wound where the bullet had emerged.

While this was going on, Morgan noticed the empty cartridge shell near his feet and picked it up. It was a .32 and he put it in his pocket.

"Make up your mind about us?" he asked.

"Righto." Snyder, his wound taped, shrugged into his shirt. "I nearly forgot about the duck."

"Duck?"

"The amphibian. She's gassed and ready. We can go a long ways from here before we have to set her down." He turned as Larson held his coat. "What about it? You want to go with me or stay with the ship?"

Larson looked worried. "I hadn't thought, sir, not knowing what you had in mind."

"You're a Swede, aren't you, Larson?" Morgan asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And you don't mind working for a Nazi?"

Larson flushed. "Mr. Snyder is no Nazi, sir."

"He has strange playmates for one who isn't."

"I thought I explained that," Snyder said.

"You're a German," Morgan said.

"My parents were. I'm an American." Snyder angled his sun-bleached brows sardonically. "I'm a neutral."

"You're for Snyder."

"I'm for Snyder. Van Orman is a Nazi, damn his soul, but he could pay big for what I had—or thought I had—to sell. You want to know my credo? I'll tell you. When it comes time for me to get into this bloody war your enemy will be mine; until then I'm out to make what I can and no questions asked."

"I'll go with you, sir," Larson said.

"Then we'd better get started." Snyder moved to the door. "The crew'll be drifting back before we know it. You've got a boat in the water, Larson? Good . . . Well, come on then, you three. I'll give you a ride."

Morgan rose. "Now listen, Snyder, don't be a fool!"

Snyder gestured with the gun and his voice got flat. "I don't want to argue. I'm sick of talking. Go on, now. Shove along."

Morgan started to protest, but Valery Ward's hand was on his arm. "We'd better humor him," she said lightly. "It can't be much worse than it has been. And besides he's a very competent pilot."

Snyder looked at her strangely. "Come on, Laughlin," he said. "You're in on it too now even if Van Orman is the lad who wanted you here."

Morgan suddenly felt tired and defeated. He had thought he could reason with Snyder. No fanaticism was driving him as it had the German and of the two he would rather take a chance with this man. Yet he could not forget the things the other had told him that afternoon.

Snyder had not Van Orman's callousness or inherent cruelty but when the stakes were high he gambled all out. Cornered, he would be more deadly than the German because he had more natural ability and resourcefulness; the shooting proved that much.

Going past him on the way to the door, Morgan tried to read his mind, to guess what lay behind the blue eyes and the grin, and suddenly he knew he would not let the man take them up in that plane. The automatic felt cool and reassuring against his stomach.

CHAPTER XXIV

TO CATCH A KILLER

THE little cove where the amphibian was moored was down-river from the *Hammondsen* about two hundred yards, and when the painter of the boat had been made fast to the craft, Snyder ordered Larson to remove the motor covers.

"We'll just sit here until things are ready," he said.

He was sitting in the bow, facing Morgan and Laughlin, who had done the rowing. Behind them was Valery Ward. The tide had swung them downstream and beyond the wing of the amphibian the freighter was vaguely silhouetted against the starlit sky. It seemed darker here, with the blackness of the water all about them, but Morgan could make out the gun in Snyder's hand against the lighter background of his coat.

With the oars shipped, his own hands were free and he slipped the right one to the automatic in his belt and transferred it to his side pocket. After that he sat with his hand on the gun. Presently Larson had finished. He pulled the boat alongside the sleek and dimly shining hull.

"Get in and watch them," Snyder said.

He and Larson exchanged places and Morgan saw the big man disappear through the doorway of the cabin. Light glowed faintly in the cockpit and in another minute there came the whine of a starter, the hollow chug of a propeller as it began its spasmodic turning; then there was a sudden roar as the motor came to life, sputtering and skipping at first and finally settling to a steady rhythmic beat as it was idled down.

Morgan heard the second motor start but his attention had now centered on the craft itself. It was, he saw, of considerable size; large enough to accommodate perhaps six or eight passengers. He did not know what the cruising radius might be, but as a guess he put it at six or seven hundred miles. He shifted his position slightly, stretching his right leg out so that he would have freedom of movement for his gun hand, and watched Snyder appear in the cabin doorway and draw the boat alongside.

Now was the time. Larson was busy holding the two hulls together. Snyder had squatted on his heels, the gun dangling between his knees. His chest was about five feet from Morgan's pocket, a broad and certain target.

Morgan's finger closed upon the trigger. He angled the muzzle upward and waited, thinking hard and then trying not to think. There was no longer any need for thought; all he had to do was pull the trigger.

Don't think, just pull! Larson won't argue when he sees Snyder topple! . . . He took a breath. The dryness was in his throat now and inside him things began to shrivel up. He realized he had removed his finger from the trigger and put it back. *All right, pull it! Don't trust him. Once he gets you in that plane with Valery you may never have another chance.*

"I guess we're ready," Snyder said. "I'll hold on here, Larson. Cast off the stern mooring. There's something I want you to do for me . . ."

Morgan caught his breath, every muscle, every tendon static. Was Snyder talking to him? What was that he was saying? Valery Ward's voice slid past him.

"You mean we're not going with you, Kerry?"

The laugh was quick and genuine. Morgan pried his finger from the trigger.

"Fooled you, hunh?" Snyder said. "Had an idea that's what you thought when you made that crack back a while. Take you with me? For what? What good can you do me now? I'm through here and I know it."

MORGAN'S nerves turned to liquid and he pulled a sweaty hand from his pocket. Reaction made him sick to his stomach and he shivered from an inner coldness. He started to speak but words wouldn't start.

"But—what are you going to do?" Valery Ward said.

"Get distance between me and Georgetown. Morgan outsmarted me with that other will. Of course, I've got a legitimate half interest in that rubber acreage." He chuckled again. "Maybe I'll be around to collect some day when there aren't any charges against me.

"But here's what I want you to do. See Tasha Girouard. I got a cable today—this evening—and I didn't have a chance to tell her. Her father's dead. Died of pneumonia, so the cable says. You knew about him, Val?"

"Yes," the girl said, and Morgan remembered the things the woman had told him, realizing now that they had all been true.

"You knew about us too, didn't you?" Snyder went on.

"I knew."

"Well, she won't have to worry any more about someone turning him in to the Gestapo. It's best this way, I guess. And tell her this, Val. Tell her to meet me four weeks from tonight. She'll know where."

He said something else but Morgan did not hear it because he had to do a lot of thinking in a very short time. Until a minute or so ago the past hours had obliterated all consideration save the urgent one of personal safety—Val's and his own. Now all the old thoughts came surging back and he knew that he had, after all, accomplished nothing.

"The only thing you'll ever collect, Snyder, is a rope around your neck," he said.

"What're you talking about?"

"If they ever pick you up in any British colony they'll bring you back and hang you."

He could feel Snyder's stare stabbing at him through the darkness.

"You think I killed Johnny Hammond?"

"The police do."

"Ahh—"

"I'm telling you."

"But look here. Why should I kill Johnny? Good God, the police can't think—"

"Can't they?" Morgan kept his voice curt and convincing. "You've got no alibi for the first or second murders and you've got all the motive in the world when the police hear our stories and know about the will. I might be able to give you an alibi for last night, but why should I?" He paused. Snyder said nothing. "You had a woman in your bungalow just before I came last night. I heard the door slam as she left."

"You're crazy," Snyder said. "You heard her come in. She was there while you were and the rain kept her there."

"Is that what you were doing with your car just after I left? Taking her home?"

"What about it?" Snyder seemed to lean forward, clinging to the cabin door. Morgan could actually see his eyes now, the lighter line of his bleached brows above them. "Come on, out with it? What're you driving at?"

"I want to get the man that killed my uncle—and the others. Listen! Who do you think had the best motive to want Johnny out of the way—next to your own, of course?"

FOR a long moment after that everything was still. Larson had moved along the amphibian's hull; he stood motionless, clinging to the wing. Morgan had leaned forward. He waited. Then someone sighed audibly. Snyder. And when he finally spoke his voice was curiously hushed.

"Van Orman! Van Orman," he said again and there was a biting bitterness in the cadence of that word. "He had to kill him before Johnny got in touch with Laughlin. Johnny must have been suspicious of him before Doyle came to see him. That's why he hired Osborne and Osborne looked him up and made a report and he was murdered before he could give that report to you. Van Orman would kill ten men if it meant buying those ships."

"Do you know where to find him?"

"I thought about him before," Snyder said, as if he had not heard. "I wondered but I didn't know. There was no way of— What did you say? Find him? Maybe I do. What difference does it make?" he added savagely. "You don't think I'd go back and face the story you two can tell, do you?"

"What story?"

"Why the—"

"I thought you told me you got Valery away without connecting yourself with the job. And anyway I think she'd rather help get Johnny's murderer than worry about making it tough for you. I should think you owed Van Orman a little something for that hole in your shoulder. Me, I like to pay off for things like that but if it's okay with you—"

"What's the rest of it?"

"You can help me catch the killer. I think I know enough to clear you of suspicion, but that's up to you. You run out on this and I'm damned if I'll say a word for you. Furthermore—" Morgan was getting wound up now but Snyder stopped him.

"Larson!" he yelled, though Larson was less than three feet away. "Put us ashore. Then come back and cover those motors and get the stern lines aboard."

"And leave the *Hammondsen* right where she is," Morgan said.

Snyder jumped in the boat, so angry he was talking more to himself than to Morgan. "I'll find him. . . . Don't worry about me. . . . Don't do me any favors. No one ever has but Johnny and why should you start now?"

TO BE CONCLUDED IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Salvation Bullet

By Jim Kjelgaard

Author of "The Fire God's Kindling," "Starvation Island," etc.

The strength of these two men together could have moved a strong new world. But only one of them could endure; only one of them could come out of this bush alive. And it was a secret to be shared with the wolves

BACK IN the spruces the twenty-one barren grounds wolves that were following the two men and the girl moaned and panted, and made slithering silky little noises as they padded about. The wolves had not dared come very close yet because of the fire, because the people there could still move freely, and because they had a rifle.

There was only one cartridge for it. But the wolves did not know that.

By the campfire halfway between two of the little bunches of spruces with which the country was dotted, one of the men stirred in his blanket and sat up. He was Sam Jackson, a heavy-set man with a brown beard. His cheeks were only now beginning to show that for two weeks he had eaten nothing but the emergency rations that each of the three had in their pockets when the plane disappeared beneath the waves of Comber Lake. The pilot, Tobias, had been killed; and maybe that was his good luck.

Jackson glanced at his two companions. Even under the blanket there was something in the pose of Fierley, something in the way his body sprawled and in his irregular breathing, that was now deep and steady and now high-pitched and broken, that betrayed utter exhaustion. But Jean Collins slept easily.

Jean was the daughter of the mine superintendent at Breed Lake. Jackson was in love with her. He knew that she was in love with Fierley, the pale-veined young mining engineer who worked with protractors and transits, and whose hands would be irreparably damaged after one day with a pick and shovel. But that was of no moment now because Fierley was going to die in this wilderness.

For a bit Jackson sat pondering the fate, both luck and innate strength, that had lifted him from the ranks of laborers to make him assistant superintendent of a mine. It had brought him wealth, and now was bringing him Jean. Or rather, bringing Jean back to him.

Bert Collins had sent Jackson and Fierley to Edmonton ostensibly to receive instructions for carrying on new research; and Jean had gone along in the plane for a shopping tour of the city. On the way back Jackson and Fierley were supposed to stop at Raddom Lake and investigate traces of gold that had been found there.

But Jackson knew that the real reason he and Fierley were going to Edmonton was to face the police. Two thousand ounces of gold that only Jackson and Fierley had had access to had disappeared. Jackson had taken it; now had it cached in a safe place. With Fierley dead, blame could be shifted to him. The Jackson luck was still working full force.

If the plane hadn't gone down, Jackson might have had a hard time bluffing his way out, might not have been able to convince the police that Fierley was really the thief.

When the plane had left, Jackson, an experienced traveler in the north, had insisted that each passenger carry emergency rations on his person and a blanket strapped to him. Jackson had regarded the rifle as part of his emergency rations. It was a .300 bolt-action Savage, and he had had a full box of cartridges for it in his shirt pocket.

With Fierley on his back, Jackson knew that he was close to exhaustion now

But the force of the crash had thrown him forward, and the pocket had ripped out on a ragged bit of metal. In the water Jackson had carried the rifle on a leather sling over his shoulder, and had brought it safely ashore with a single bullet in its chamber.

Bound to Jackson's belt was a leather pouch containing ten sticks of ninety-percent dynamite, part of the prospecting outfit. Jackson had kept it on his person be-

cause it was sensitive stuff that could be set off by hardly more than a light tap. He was carrying it with him in case they came to a rock-bottomed stream where the dynamite could be used to blast out fish.

The rifle and the dynamite together represented only two slim chances to get himself and Jean out of this wilderness. But slim chances were all Jackson had ever had or asked. It was a foregone conclusion that Fierley could not survive. He needed adequate help to do anything physical, and all the help Jackson could give him now would be inadequate.

Jackson chuckled mirthlessly. Most of Fierley's work at the mine had been done behind a desk. But he had discovered new ore veins, introduced better and cheaper methods of mining, salvaged waste ore. Finally, after both Jackson and Bert Collins had pronounced it impossible, he had found a way to build a road so the ore from a small isolated mine in the center of a swamp could be brought out.

Fierley had received all the credit for doing this—but Jackson and his crew had done all the work. Now let Farley use his damned mathematics and his vaunted brains to get himself something to eat!

BACK in the spruces the wolves sat on their haunches and licked their chops. A couple of them moaned softly, the sound rolling out over the barren prairie in an increasing wave that gradually died. Jackson thought of a stone thrown into the water. The fact that wolves would hunt people showed the desperate poverty of the country. In the two weeks since they had left Comber Lake the only game they had seen were two ptarmigan.

Jackson looked at the spruces and tried to make out the wolves. He couldn't. The only time any of the party had seen a wolf was when one had appeared on some mound or hillock far enough behind to be out of rifle shot. Wolves were fools, cowards. They could rush the three people, and at the most one of their number would die before they made their kill. But they dared not take the chance. Jackson began to feel a little contempt for the wolves.

When a streak of light showed in the sky, and the sun reappeared as suddenly as it had gone down, Jackson bent over the girl and shook her shoulder.

"Time to be moving."

She arose, alert and ready. Jackson approved, though his manner was expressionless. This girl could face things and was not afraid—except for Fierley. Jackson's eyes followed hers to him. He nodded.

"It's tough, Jean. But we must keep him moving." He walked over and shook Fierley. "Come on! Daylight!"

Fierley made no move and Jackson kicked him, his face now masking pleasure because he did not have to be kind to this man he despised. He could not rise to hating Fierley.

"Come on, damn it! You can't sleep here all day!"

Fierley got up, first stirring as if any motion at all was painful and then rising to his knees, the blanket hanging over him curiously remindful of the shaggy hair of an animal. But when he got to his feet and the blanket fell from him all that impression fell with it.

Never heavy, Fierley had lost weight fast and was pitifully thin. But there was something about him—Jackson was uneasy because he could not place exactly what—that was disquieting. Fierley walked over to the fire, for a moment looked into it, and grinned at Jean.

"The Hotel Barrens offers two courses for breakfast—water and air. Better take both, darling."

Jackson writhed. Jean had been almost ready to marry him when Fierley came along. Women were unpredictable. They could have a man and they chose a puny apology for a man. But when Fierley died Jean would return to Jackson because whatever spell Fierley had cast over her would die with him.

Jackson couldn't understand it. Only once in his life had he admitted that there was a better man than he. After a grueling ten day race, a prospector named Mannig had beaten him to a claim. Arriving at the claim two hours after Mannig, Jackson had immediately challenged his rival to a fist fight and had been fairly beaten.

Hating Mannig after that, Jackson had still paid him due homage. But Mannig had died of pneumonia.

JACKSON exulted in the strength he could still feel when he started off. He walked fast. There was no need to fear that Jean could not keep up. Healthy and lithe as a panther, she could walk as far as he and he could go as far as necessary.

That one cartridge in the gun was good for one moose or caribou; and with the vision of that moose or caribou before him, Jackson could not die or be hopeless. But he was not surprised when in the middle of the morning Fierley fell, to remain where he was.

Jackson walked back. Fierley was not done yet, but was romanticizing this, killing his body with his mind. He saw himself walking as far as he could through the wilderness, staggering the final fateful steps, and collapsing to die with perhaps a brave smile for the woman who loved him.

Jackson grinned inwardly. In all its stark reality that picture was not far off. But it wasn't yet.

Jean stood beside Fierley looking down, and the only noticeable change in her was in the frightened eyes and flushed cheeks. Jackson put his hands on his hips. Fierley could stay here for all he cared, but Jean was watching. He must not abandon Fierley until Fierley died.

"Get up!" Jackson's voice was like gritting sand.

Fierley rolled over and looked at him from tragic eyes, then gasped and fell back. Jackson kicked him in the ribs—hard. Jean raised her head, and her eyes blazed into Jackson's. She looked away, and for a second Jackson knew a strange embarrassment. It was a sensation so foreign to anything he had ever felt before and so hard to cope with that for a few seconds he was at a total loss. That kick hadn't been necessary. But he must go through with it now.

He said, "Fierley, if you don't get up I'll kick your ribs in and leave you for the wolves to eat—alive!"

Fierley closed and opened his eyes, and raised himself four inches with his right arm. Then he rose to a crawling posture, from that to his knees, and stood erect.

"If we ever get out of this, I'll kill you!" he said hoarsely.

"Fine."

Jackson glanced down the back trail. The wolves weren't in sight, but they were following. And when the wolves came to this place, they would know a man had fallen here.

Tonight they would probably hang closer to the fire.

Toward evening Jackson had a great stroke of luck. He killed a muskrat.

THE PRAIRIE was crossed and criss-crossed with numbers of little streams that were full of small trout and grayling about seven or eight inches long. Tobias, gone down with the plane, had had all the fishing tackle, and the streams were roilly with mud bottoms. A stick of dynamite thrown in would either explode harmlessly in the mud or at the most get three or four fish.

The muskrat was sitting on the bank of one of the streams. Jackson kicked it as he walked across, and tumbled headlong into two feet of water to get it. He

swung the dripping rat aloft by its tail and banged its head against the trunk of a spruce tree. Immediately he grasped it by the front paws and turned it the other side up to save the few precious drops of blood that were oozing from the nose.

Gloating, he turned to face Jean and Fierley, on the opposite bank of the creek. He had made a kill.

Jean winked, and ran her tongue about her lips. "I knew you'd get us something," she said. Fierley clasped his hands together and shook them.

"Well done, old boy."

For a moment Jackson stood in shocked surprise. He didn't know exactly what reaction he had expected, but it should have been other than this. The muskrat was food, and to starving people food should be worth more than the wink of an eye and a few words.

A sudden anger rose in him. Fierley— He had kicked and beaten Fierley, and the sniveling coward was trying to gloss it over, wanted to be friendly just because Jackson had a muskrat.

He needn't feel resentful of Jean because it was a woman's right to expect things from a man, and any man worthy of the name should at least try hard to give his woman what she wanted and had to have. Jackson climbed farther up on the bank and made for another open space between two bunches of spruces. Dripping wet, Jean and Fierley came up.

Jackson said, "Pick up a few chips and make a fire," and started back to the trees to bring in more wood. They couldn't camp in the spruces because cover lent wolves a sense of confidence. Jackson went clear through the spruces to the next open space and looked back.

Dim gray shapes against the bunch of trees a few hundred yards beyond, three wolves sat on their haunches. They had never come that close before. Jackson dragged a great pile of wood into camp.

Jean was skinning the muskrat, being careful to leave no mite of flesh adhering to the skin. Finished, she handed the hide to Jackson and he tucked it into the pouch along with the dynamite.

He watched her pack the red carcass in wet clay and throw it into the fire. After half an hour she rolled it out with a stick, chipped the baked clay off with the ax handle, and cut the muskrat in three equal parts. They ate slowly, breaking the small bones and sucking the marrow from them.

In the spruces a wolf moaned softly, and as one the three turned their heads toward the sound. The action was almost mechanical, but the wolves had been on their trail a long time now. Jackson wondered what, if anything, the wolves had eaten.

Fierley lay supine, his hands folded on his breast. Jackson tossed the blanket over and Fierley wrapped himself in it. Feet to the fire, he raised his head.

"Have the boy call me at ten," he said, and fell asleep.

FIERLEY had had a little food, and his gentle and regular breathing as distinguished from his uneasy sleep of last night showed it. Jean looked down at him, and across at Jackson. Her voice was soft and gentle.

"It's hard on him. But you'll get us out."

He said with sudden harshness, "We're in a tough spot."

Jackson had scarcely uttered the words when he wished mightily that he could retract them. They were shameful things to fling at a woman. As a man, he had the job of facing a man's problems, such as those which faced them now. He sat tensely. Then her words crossed the bridge of silence that had been built up between them.

"I know we are. But since this had to be, I'd rather have him with you than with anyone else I can think of."

Jackson shook his head doggedly as he strove to understand. But Jean, he told himself, and not he, was the one who did not understand. He could do nothing to help Fierley. Fierley had to have food and there was no food.

As he had always done, in one single leap Jackson tried to go over the maze of things and get to the source. Everything was simple when he did that. Fierley was going to die. So Jean would come back to Jackson. It was only another demonstration of a rule that was as old as the world itself. The fittest survived.

But somehow it did not seem as clear to Jackson as such explanations had always been before. He fell to watching Jean.

She sat directly across from him with her head thrown back while the wavering light painted her long throat and neck a ruddy bronze. Looking at her, Jackson knew that never in his life had he needed anything as much as he needed this girl.

It was a hunger that went far beyond any cravings of the stomach. All his life he had striven and fought for things because he could not help fighting. But all of it had been only a desperate and relentless battle against a world that he must crush before it crushed him.

Now it was a battle for her. She was the rallying point about which he would make all his stands.

Startlingly, it occurred to him that now he could take her just as he had taken everything else, by force. He arose, and moved around the fire to sit beside her. But the thought had no meaning, no depth, seemed impossible to put into execution so abruptly. As a pretext for moving back to his own side of the fire he arose to throw on more wood.

He built happy, childish little dreams about the life he and Jean would have together. He would go back to Breed Lake; not free of suspicion perhaps, but certainly without fear that anyone could ever prove he had taken the gold. He would start off prospecting, stay in the bush a couple of months, and come back with the gold—seventy thousand dollars worth. With that as a nucleus, he would build a great fortune to buy Jean everything she had ever dreamed of wanting.

FOUR DAYS and seventy miles farther on Fierley fell again. Jackson, bringing up the rear, saw him stop, lean against a spruce, and clutching the trunk slide slowly to the ground.

Jackson surveyed him calmly. Since the day the plane wrecked he had known that he would see Fierley lying thus, and knew also that Fierley would die very close to this place.

Jean turned around, came running back, looking down at Fierley.

Jackson said calmly, "I'll have to carry him out of these trees."

"He's comfortable here!"

It was not a woman who had said that, Jackson thought, but a she tiger who saw her mate in peril. And like a tiger, when the mate was dead, she would soon forget to grieve.

Jackson pointed back. Scarcely five hundred feet away the wolf pack sat silently. Jean seemed to have forgotten the wolves, but now she followed his pointing finger and nodded.

"You're right, as usual. We'll have to move him."

Only with the added load of Fierley on his back did Jackson know how utterly tired, how close to collapse, he himself was.

He carried Fierley to a little swale halfway between two patches of spruces about a hundred yards apart. There was a high mound forty feet this side of one of the patches, and on it grew a lone bushy spruce.

Jackson covered Fierley with a blanket and Jean came up to drop beside him. She smoothed his hair back with her hands, and stroked his thin face. Jackson wondered, curiously, what had become of all the exultation and all the sense of triumph that he had known he would feel when Fierley died. He picked up the ax.

"Got to get wood," he said, in response to Jean's questioning glance.

He walked to the spruces, cut down and dragged back a tree. It was only a little tree, but he had to struggle with it. He went back for another tree, and another. Fierley lay awake, his eyes staring straight upward.

Jackson set to work cutting the branches from the trees. The trunks could be laid on the fire as they were, and when they burned through could be pulled up to an unburned part. Jackson did not feel any weariness of the sort that called for sleep. He knew that he would if he permitted himself to. But somewhere up ahead, too far ahead now to be of any use to Fierley, was the moose or caribou that would take him and Jean out of here. He had to get that now and would get it.

Fierley went to sleep, and Jean lay down beside him. Jackson walked around the fire to throw his own blanket down to her. Without speaking she raised her head. The she tiger, defending her own—Jackson felt a little lump rise in his throat. He built the fire high and lay down with the rifle at his side.

When the sun sprang up in the morning five wolves, gaunt gray parodies of living things, sat on the mound under the bushy spruce. Jackson got up. One of the five thrust its tongue out and yawned. Not hurrying, the wolves walked from the mound back to the spruces. Jean rose, bent over Fierley, and looked at Jackson.

Jackson said, "I'm going hunting. Do you think you can keep a fire until I get back?"

"Yes. But why a fire in the daytime?"

"Because— Look there!"

He pointed to the mound, where a great gray wolf with a silvery head and neck sat silently.

Jean said, "I'll keep the fire going. And good luck. I know you'll get us out."

JACKSON DIDN'T kill any game. He hadn't expected to when he started out, and he was irritated with himself because he had hunted hard. Everything he wanted had come about, for if he got a moose or caribou Fierley could get up and go on after he had eaten; but Jackson had hunted hard anyway.

He came to the fire. Jean was sitting beside Fierley, who was rolled in his blanket. Jackson nodded.

"How is he?"

"He was up and around today. He wanted to help me keep the fire. But I wouldn't let him."

Jackson gave a cursory glance toward the mound. Nine wolves were grouped about the spruce. He looked back at Jean, sitting with her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands. She said dully:

"They've been there all day."

"Yes," Jackson murmured. "Yes, I guess they have."

She looked directly at him.

"Without food he's going to die here. With food, he could get out."

Jackson moved uncomfortably. "There is no food."

"Yes there is. And I can get it—the wolves."

He jerked as if stung. "*You* can get it?"

"Yes." Her voice was eager, pleading. "I think they might have tried to get us today if it hadn't been for the fire. They're very hungry—certainly hungry enough to attack anyone who might wander from the fire at night.

"I know we can't afford to use the one bullet on only one wolf. One wouldn't furnish enough food. But I could take the rifle and the dynamite and go sit near the tree until they were very close. Then I could shoot into the dynamite. That would kill them. You could get him out of here if you had food."

She waited tensely. Jackson sat loosely before the fire, the rifle across his knees. It was surprising how hard it was to take this, the second beating he had ever had. Mannig had given him the first, and now Fierley. Only a very strong man could get from a girl like Jean Collins all the things Jackson wanted—and they all belonged to Fierley.

He guessed that he should have recognized it from the first. But he could see only tangible things. A life was certainly tangible—and precious.

Then Jackson stopped thinking about the intricate pattern of things that had led to this. The facts were simple again. Any man worthy of the name would at least try hard to get for his woman what she wanted and had to have. And Jean had placed Fierley in his hands.

He raised the rifle, sighted on a knot in the tree trunk, and tried to hold the gun steady. But the muzzle wobbled, described almost a four-inch circle. He rested it over his knees and tried again, but still the gun wobbled. If he had found a moose or caribou he probably would have missed it, wasted his one cartridge on it. Jackson strove to be casual.

"I've got a better scheme. I found a salt lick today that a lot of moose have been using. Almost certainly there'll be one there tonight. And I'll get him."

A weight seemed to drop from her. "I knew you could save us," she said.

"Jean, I promise you that tonight there'll be plenty of food in camp. Incidentally, in case I forget it, I'm not going back to Breed Lake. I've got a new offer. Tell your father to look in the chimney of my line cabin at Trot Flow, will you? He'll understand."

IT WAS dark when Jackson left camp. He started in the same direction he had hunted, but circled back toward the mound when he was out of the firelight.

Stopping on the mound, he took the muskrat hide from the pouch and put the eight sticks of dynamite in it. He shoved the tip of the rifle muzzle into the dynamite-filled pelt, and with the buckskin thong that had closed the leather pouch, bound it tightly on.

The wolves left the mound when he came up. But he heard them padding restlessly about only a few feet away. There was a sudden patter of paws as one charged toward him and turned back. Jackson swung into the tree, and looked once toward the fire to see a shower of sparks arise as the girl put more wood on.

He didn't look at the fire again, but into the barrens. He seemed to be looking over his whole world, and knew it a fast dying one. Probably never again would Jean have need of a man who could fight wolves and whip the bush. But all her life she would need Fierley, who could sit behind a desk and think out the problems of a strong new world that Jackson had scarcely given thought to.

It was Fierley and his breed who would really conquer this wilderness with their transits and mathematics. They could change it. The Jacksons could only meet it head on and fight it as it was.

Jackson smiled softly. Maybe, after all, he had won something of what he wanted. The world would never know that Sam Jackson had lived. But Jean would never forget. With food, Jean could take Fierley to safety.

Suddenly there was a wolf under the tree. Jackson swung the rifle down, and with a rush the packed body of hunger-mad wolves crowded toward the stale scent of the muskrat skin. Jackson pulled the trigger.

As the force of the explosion hurled him into oblivion, he saw that most of the wolves would die with him.

Argonotes

WE'RE passing through quickly. We've no time for comedy or cosmic musings because there is a long and very interesting letter waiting, and if we dally here you won't get the full benefit of it. So follow along, please; we have a man we want you to meet.

ROB THOMPSON

Seeing the bars down and nothing private about the scrap, I had an idea I'd chip in with my two-bits. Lud Landmichl and Gunnison Steele're having the same argument in Writer's Digest. It's interesting. This thing of a writer's background.

First place, Vic Kelly, Aberdeen, S. D., has my whole-hearted backing on his criticism of some of the so-called "Westerns" published today.

For instance, the one that's running currently in *your* book, ARGOSY. This "Ramrod Ridge" thing. Nothing wrong with the author's plot and action. But I emphatically criticize his dialogue. The supposed-to-be western, idiomatic phraseology. The stuff that W. C. McD. lets dribble from the mouths of his characters is *terrific* and if that gentleman, the author, has ever tailed a cow, or taken the rough off a bronc for a living, I'll eat both steer and bronc.

I know—McDonald has built himself quite a rep writing Western yarns, or what he and a lot of folks who don't know the difference between a jinglebob and a left-under-crop, *think* are Western stories. But, as far as real cow-savvy is concerned, he's as phony as a Western fictioneer, and that goes for plenty of other good writers who do what they believe to be Western yarns. But more power to them all if they can get away with it. Just compare their Western lingo with Wally Coburn's, or any other cowhand who has turned to writing, and you'll get what I mean.

I've punched cows myself for upwards of twenty years, from Wyoming to Texas, and I know by his writing or speech when a man's been through the ropes. Wally Coburn has. Ninety percent of the other Western-story writers have not.

One more *very* pet peeve, and I'll fold up. Any author (he's presumably intelligent or he wouldn't be an author) who allows any of his characters to smack another over the noggin with the *butt* of a gun (and some of the best of them will do it) has never had occasion to handle a gun or pistol-whip someone with it. That's not a slip. It's a darn bad mistake, and if I were the editor of a good magazine it'd be one of my strictest taboos.

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